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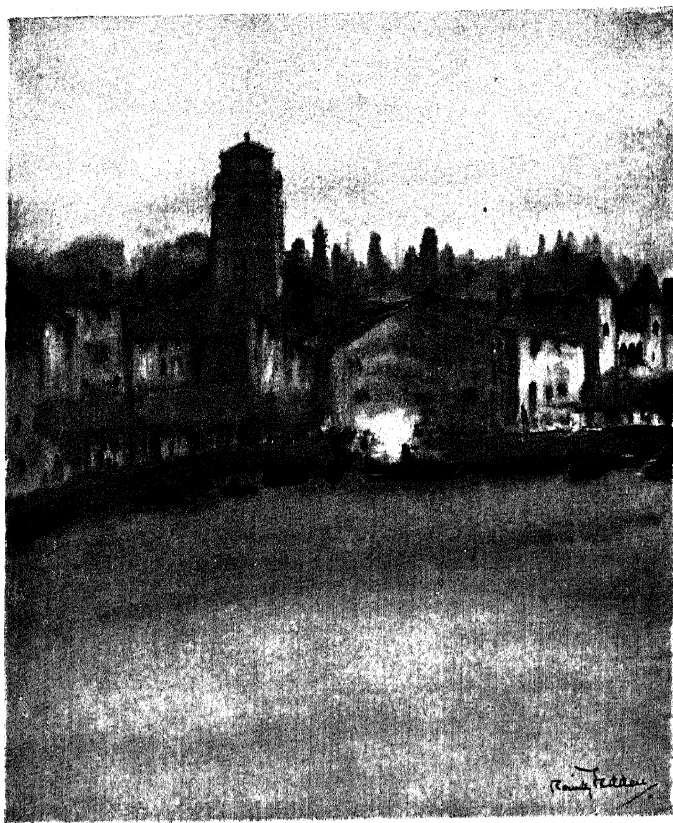




## THE BASQUE COUNTRY







ST. JEAN DE LUZ, EVENING.



# THE BASQUE COUNTRY

PAINTED BY  
ROMILLY FEDDEN  
DESCRIBED BY  
KATHARINE FEDDEN



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## INTRODUCTION

IT is a far cry to the days of the eighteenth century when every traveller, safely returned from the *grand tour* in posting-chaise and diligence, felt it his duty to write his personal impressions of the journey.

To-day the whole world travels, and description savours of impertinence. We expect everyone to have seen at least as much as we have seen. Yet, strangely enough, though the Basque country is within a well-travelled zone, no single book can be found in English to answer the questions that the traveller, charmed and interested by this little people, is sure to ask. This, then, is our excuse for adding one more to the already long list of place-books,—that while we can claim no pretension to special knowledge of a subject which has long proved one of dissension to the learned, we yet hope to give some information and pleasure to the traveller who, like ourselves, may come to this fascinating country,

## Introduction

ignorant alike of its history and traditions. To such  
a one we say with the Basque proverb,

“ Autrefois comme cela,  
Aujourd’hui comme ceci ;  
Après, on ne sait comment ! ”

KATHARINE FEDDEN.

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BAYONNE :

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To Guéthary, Bidart, St. Jean de Luz.

To Peyrehorade, Orthez, Pau, Oloron, Tardets, Mauléon, Sauveterre, St. Palais, St. Jean-Pied-de-Port, St. Etienne de Baïgorry, Cambo, Ustaritz, Bayonne.

ST. JEAN DE LUZ :

To St. Pée, Sare, Ainhoa, Ascain.

To Urrugne.

To Hendaye, Ile des Faisans, Irun, Fontarabia.

*Valley of the Saison*

TARDETS :

To Licq, Ste. Engrâce, Etchebar, Larrau.

*Valley of the Laurhibar*

ST. JEAN-PIED-DE-PORT :

To St. Jean-le-Vieux, Ahaxe, Lecumberry, Mendive.

*Valley of the Béhérobie*

ESTERENÇUBY :

To St. Michel, Béhérobie, and Forest of Iraty.

# Itinerary

## *Valley of the Arnéguy*

ESTERENÇUBY :

To Uhart-Cize, Lasse, Arnéguy, Val Carlos, Pass of  
Roncevaux, Burguete.

## *Valley of the Aldudes*

ST. ETIENNE DE BAÏGORRY :

To Urepel.

To the Col d'Ispeguy.

CAMBO :

To Hasparren.

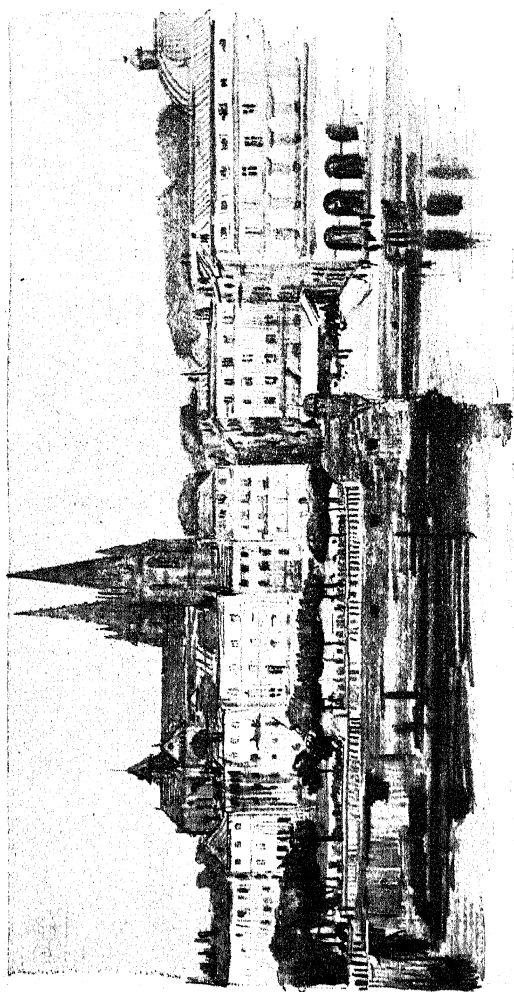
To Itxassou.

To Espelette.

Map—Carte Routière, No. 22.

A. Taride, 18 Boulevard St. Denis, Paris.

*Note.*—To turn kilometres into miles, divide by 8, multiply  
by 5.



BAYONNE.

# THE BASQUE COUNTRY

## CHAPTER I

### *ORIGIN AND HISTORY*

POPULAR legend, which arises ever in answer to a people's questioning, recounts that a great serpent sleeps under the range of the Pyrenees, and that this creature, stirring in its dream of ages, raised the long chain of mountains above its moving length, while from its seven jaws gushed forth a fiery flood. Of this fire was the Basque country born, primeval as the source which gave it birth, and to this day it holds something elemental, a scarce-veiled Pagan spirit which has survived Christianising and the centuries. Its forests are still peopled with mythical creatures—in the caves of Belsola in Biscaye they dwell, whence come apparitions of primitive men and savage women to affright in tale on winter evenings; on the heights of Mont d'Anie still echo the enchantments of mysterious nuptials, the marriage rites of the fabled Maïtagorri and the young Lusaïde; poetic imaginings of this race born of fire, of the great life-giver, the sun.

So much for legend. Before we ask what is known in fact of this people, let us endeavour to place them,

## The Basque Country

to see their background and to glance at their neighbours.

The Pyrenees are roughly figured in our minds as a wall of mountains which extends from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, and separates France from Spain. To be exact, it is not an unbroken chain, but two shorter ranges, one of which starts from near the Bay of Biscay and runs 124 miles east to the Peak of Sabourede; the other of which starts from the Mediterranean and runs 117 miles west to the Pic d'Arhousse, eight miles south of Sabourede. These two ranges are joined by a saddle of hills running north and south.

The character of the two faces of this chain differs greatly. On the north side, the range presents a bold and precipitous barrier to France; here the hills and valleys run at right angles to the main range, and the total distance from summit to plain is nowhere more than twenty miles. On the Spanish side, on the contrary, the hills and valleys run in folds parallel to the main range, and the distance from summit to plain is in places as much as sixty miles. The valleys on both sides are traversed by streams called *gaves* in French and *gabas* in Spanish. Depressions in the lower ridges are called *cols*, and those in the main range *ports*, through which the passes lead from one country to the other.

On the French side, the long valleys leading up at right angles to the main range all present the same general characteristics. Just under the crest of the

## Origin and History

mountain is a hamlet, generally giving its name to the pass into Spain; a few miles below we find that the narrow, rock-bound valley widens into a plain or *plan*, once a lake-bed, where you will come upon the first mountain town. Again the valley shrinks and you may follow it a few miles down to the second *plan*, where a second and larger town is found. From here the valley runs widening to debouch into the plains or *landes*, and there, at the debouchment, stands the most important town, guarded by the ruins of a castle on a commanding height. This town not only holds the gate to the valley but also the gate to the pass, which means the guarding of larger issues of racial and national importance. This town is to-day the meeting-place of demand and supply, and thrives on the commerce between mountain and plain.

The Pyrenees in their whole extent are the home of several distinct racial types. Astride the Mediterranean end are the Catalans; in the centre on the French side are the Béarnais, on the Spanish side the Aragonese; astride the Atlantic end we find the Basques. Each of these groups of people is distinct by language, physique and character from the others.

The Basque Country, astride the Atlantic end of the Pyrenees, is roughly bounded on the east by the Gave d'Oloron and the Gave d'Aspé in France, and by the Esca and Veral Rivers in Spain, on the south by the provinces of Santander, Burgos, and Logroño,



## The Basque Country

on the west by the Atlantic, and on the north by the Adour River as far as Peyrehorade, where it joins the Gave d'Oloron. Such are its physical boundaries; its political divisions were formerly the seven sister provinces (seven flames from the serpent's jaws) the Zaspia-bat, l'Eskual Herria of Basque song and story. Of these, three are in France: Labourd, capital Bayonne; Basse-Navarre, capital St. Jean-Pied-de-Port; La Soule, capital Mauléon; and four are in Spain: Guipuzcoa, capital San Sebastian; Biscaye, capital Bilbao; Alava, capital Vittoria; and Navarre, capital Pampeluna.

The three French provinces are now comprised in the department of the Basses-Pyrénées.

It is within these narrow limits, in this fertile, wild and beautiful corner of Europe, backed by the mountain ridges, facing the sea or the rich alluvial plains, that this strange, self-contained race has preserved its individual type, life and language, for—how many thousands of years? Who are this people? Whence did they come?

These are questions as yet unanswered or, perhaps it is more correct to say, with as many answers as there are interested savants. Upon one point only are they all agreed—the antiquity of the race. “For more than thirty centuries,” so reads an *Essai sur la Noblesse Basque* written in 1785, “the Basques have played a part in history, and for far more than twelve centuries they have been the freeholders of the country they conquered, and form in the

## Origin and History

realm of France a race apart, distinguished by a language and laws which have come down from the remotest ages." The writer confidently affirms that the Basques came into Spain about fifteen years before Christ, and gradually withdrew into the hills "rather than suffer the yoke of a conqueror."

But before you give credence to this, remember that you will find the opinions of any number of other authorities to be absolutely contradictory. Baring-Gould, in his delightful book *The Deserts of Southern France*, published in 1894, says: "The whole of Aquitania was unquestionably originally peopled by the Iberian race, of which perhaps the Basques, driven into the westernmost part of the Pyrenees, are the sole remnant. . . . The name Gascon is Basque—the B has become V in Vascons, and then the V was changed into G." From this you turn to Hilaire Belloc's *Pyrenees* and read: "Against the theory that the Basques are the remnant of a people once from the Gascon Pyrenees and Spain, is the fact that they present a racial type quite distinct from the peoples on every side. All we know is what we have just stated, that while Basque place-names do occur throughout Spain and Gascony, the million or more people who speak the language occupy a tiny corner of the territory over which these names are to be found. The rest is all speculation." And speculation has run to wild lengths. The existence of this group of people who speak an agglutinative tongue in the

## The Basque Country

midst of Aryan idioms \* is full of interest and mystery. Anthropologists do not find that the Basques are a distinct race. They are a cross between the *Homo Mediterranæus* (brown, small with dolichocephallo skull) and the *Homo Alpinus* (small with brachycephalic skull), with a strain of *Homo Europæus*. As this does not tell us very much of their origin, the students have endeavoured to solve the problem through the language. The following tentative list of theories, each of which has adherents, may give some idea of the war of speculation that is waged :

That the Basques are descended from Tubal or his nephew Tarsis ;

That they were one race with the Iberians of the Caucasus who peopled Spain (Humboldt holds this view) ;

That they are a branch of an African stock (this theory held by Chaho and Antoine Abbadie).

That they are a branch of the Aryan family and the language is akin to Sanscrit ;

That the Basques are a branch of the Turanian group—related to the Finns—and came down from

\* It may be well to recall that the great linguistic and ethnological divisions of Europe and Asia are three—Turanian, Semitic and Aryan.

*The Turanian* is represented by the Tartars (Chinese, etc.), Malays, Turks, Finns, Egyptians, Esquimaux, American Indians.

*The Semitic* is represented by the Hebrews and Arabs.

*The Aryan* is represented by Hindus, Persians, Greeks, Latins, Slavs, Celts, Germans and Scandinavians.

## Origin and History

the Baltic (Bergmann's theory, also that of Prince Bonaparte);

That they are a branch of the Semitic race and came from Chaldea (Eichhoff holds this view);

That they are related to certain tribes of North American Indians (Mahn and de Charencay);

That they are descended from the ancient Egyptians (Claudio Giacomino and others).

That they are an indigenous race who have never had any further extension than their present area.

Finally, that they belong to a lost Atlantic continent whose inhabitants are represented by the Guanches of the Canary Islands and by a fair race on the Western Coast of Spain.

The truth is that you are at liberty to follow whichever theory is most sympathetic to you. It is all conjecture. For choice one would picture them as the offspring of a patriarchal race who, following the mysterious impulse towards the West, set forth thousands of years ago from Asia, that cradle of human life, on a long journey which led them to this corner of ancient Iberia, where they rested. The Celts surrounded them, failed to immerse them and passed them by; the Phœnicians brought here their gold and precious stones; the Carthaginians were received by them; the Gauls beset them and were repulsed. Last of all came Rome, and this little people—whether you call them Iberians, Vascons, Basques or Cantabrians—were unique in this respect, that they dared to resist the Imperial Eagles. Rome, accustomed to

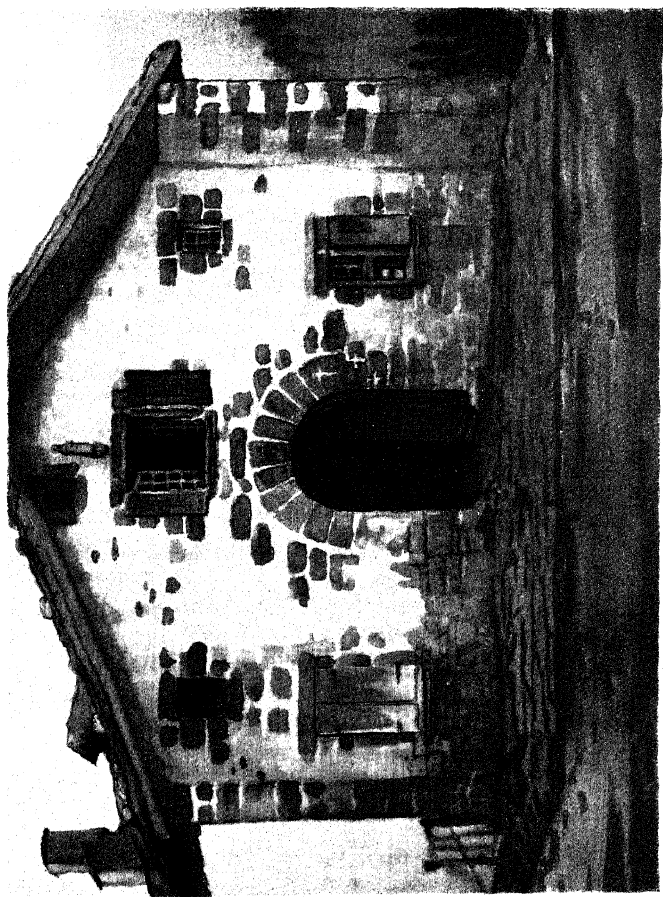
## The Basque Country

conquer, to impose her will unchecked, was amazed at such resistance. Horace, Pliny, Juvenal, Silius Italicus, wrote of these enemies of Rome who fought for their liberty bare-headed, fearing neither heat nor cold, nor hunger nor thirst, their weapon a two-edged sword. Rome, the wise maker of empires, knew the art of diplomacy as well as that of arms. Liberal concessions of autonomous power succeeded where arms failed, and the Basques became allies of the Roman Emperor and in time accepted the Roman civilisation, attracted by its arts and customs and the refinements of its manners. According to most authorities, they were one of the Nine Peoples, *Novem Populanie*, of ancient Aquitania.

A pleasant legend, widespread and generally believed, tells us that the Basques have never adored but the one God, the unknown God, *Yaun Giocoa*, from whom flows all light : *Egia*, or truth, light of the soul, *Etchia*, the sun, light of our earthly day, and *Begia*, the eye, light of the body. This legend pretends that the gods of the Romans were disdained, and that in response to Roman persuasion the Basques replied : " We worship one God in the universe, and we will raise no altars to the idols created by your priests. Yet to show our goodwill we are quite ready to admit that there are goddesses on earth and to adore them." When the Romans demanded to know who these privileged goddesses might be, the Basques made answer, " Our wives, if they permit"; and they raised



A BASQUE FARMSTEAD.







## Origin and History

altars of flowers and verdure to woman, the head of the home.

Charming as is this story, it is contradicted by fact. On the wall of the church at Hasparren, you may read for yourself the famous inscription :

Flamen item duumvir quæstor pagique magister,  
Verus ad Augustum legato munere functus,  
Pro novem optinuit populis seiungere Gallos,  
Urbe redux genio populi hanc dedicat aram.

Which means that Verus, magistrate of the *pagus* or township, sent as delegate to the Emperor, obtained the separation of the nine peoples from Gaul. On his return he dedicated this altar to the god of the locality. If you should object that Verus was a Roman and not a Basque, and that this, therefore, proves nothing, you may look further and will find proof both in the Toulouse Museum and in M. Julien Sacaze's book, *Inscriptions Antiques des Pyrénées*, that the Basques did accept the gods of Rome. They not only made offerings, built temples, offered sacrifices to the Roman gods, and dedicated funeral urns to their friends and relations, invoking the traditional Deis Manibus,—they also raised altars to their own local gods. There was the Basque Mars, DEO MARTI LEHERREN,\* a god at once savage and terrible who crushed as well as conquered, and Erditse, typifying fruitfulness, maternity; and a crowd of rural divinities, in whose worship all the poetry of the Basque nature found expression. Altars were raised to the deified beech tree which

\* *Leherren* = *leher*, to crush, from *leheren*, the serpent.

## The Basque Country

clothes the hills, in whose shade the Basque shepherd still plays his flute—a rural god with a taking name, Fagus,—

FAGO DEO BONXUS TAVRINI FILIUS

so one inscription runs. Other deities, Larraxon of the high pastures, Aherbelste of the black rocks, Baigorisc of the red earth, etc., are perpetuated to this day in the names of villages, Larrasona, Harri-belecketa, and Baïgorry—which last now bears a saint before it, St. Etienne de Baïgorry.

During the three centuries which followed their alliance with Rome, the Basque people, like all the people of Aquitania, developed the arts of peace and were saved from the first great invasions of the Vandals and their followers by this alliance. After the fall of Rome itself, from the beginning of the fifth century, existence became a struggle for life. Gaul was conquered, Aquitania submitted. But the Basques, though the Visigoths were at their gates, did not submit. They held together, retiring ever farther into the mountain fastnesses. They withdrew to the region between the two ancient Roman routes along which surged the invading hordes—the Roman road that at Roncevaux scaled the Pyrenees, and the other which led from Burdigala (Bordeaux) by the plains through Bayonne into Spain. Retired in this inaccessible region, impregnable from a military point of view, the Basques could defend themselves with a

## Origin and History

small force against an army. So they remained intact while the races about them in France and Spain were overwhelmed and swept into the sea. They remained isolated, savage and feared in their wild sanctuaries, spying down upon the passes from their rocky heights. Savages they still were when, in the twelfth century, Eymery Picaud the monk accompanied the noble Lady Gerberga on her pilgrimage to Compostello. Later it was that the Basques fought hand in hand with the Christian kings against the Moors. With the Christian knights they came to the relief of Aragon against Islam, against the redoubtable Abd-ur-Rahman.

Up to the sixteenth century, the Basque confederation of seven provinces, governed by their ancient laws, held. Then, when the English were driven from Bayonne by Gaston de Foix, Labourd became a part of the realm of France, though on the condition that it preserved certain immunities and privileges. La Soule, while remaining "a free land, free and independent by origin, without stain of servitude," became part of the Vicomté of Béarn, then passed to the crown of France, then once again formed part of the domain of the Béarnais princes; thus a domain comprising Basse-Navarre, Béarn, Foix, and the Duché of Albrét, formed the kingdom of Navarre, whose title was borne by the kings of France. The ancient Basque laws were respected down to the eve of the Revolution. Louis XVI was the last king to take the oath of fealty to those ancient

## The Basque Country

laws or *fors* of Navarre. When the union of Castille and Aragon gave a national unity to Spain, the Spanish Basque provinces took each its own manner of guarding its racial liberty. Biscaye constituted itself a free state of which the Spanish sovereigns take the title of Seigneur, but not of King, while Alava and Guipuzcoa demanded the continuance and maintenance of their ancient laws.

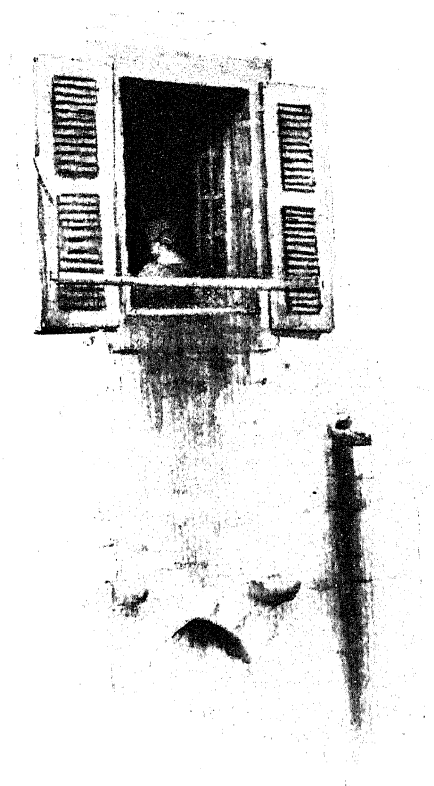
During the religious wars, the Basques remained faithful to the Roman Catholic Church, fighting against the Huguenots till peace was established by Henry IV. Then with Gascons and Béarnais they followed his white plume across France, battling for him at Courtrai, at Arques, at Ivry, and under the walls of Paris.

Although to-day the bond between the Basques on the two slopes of the Pyrenees has ceased to exist except in memory, yet on both sides of the mountains the love of the soil and the pride of race persist, in spite of all political changes. These found expression when a simple bard went forth with his guitar to sing along strange ways a song which no Basque may listen to with head covered,—a song which has become the national hymn, *Guernakaco arbola*, a hymn which breathes forth all the religious fervour, passion and fierce patriotism of this curiously separate people. To its strains, played after the Marseillaise, the Basque regiments, part of the very backbone of the French Army, went “over the top” in the late war, singing the wild passionate refrain:

## Origin and History

Guernakaco arbola,  
Adoratzen zaitugu,  
Arbola santua.

“Tree of Guernica,” they sang, “we adore thee, holy tree,” their last thought, their last word, not of France, but of that corner of the Pyrenees where the tree of liberty was planted hundreds of years ago.



## CHAPTER II

### LAWS AND LANGUAGE

THE oak, that sacred tree of Zeus, whose leaves crowned the victor in the Olympic sports, whose waving boughs shaded the temples, amidst whose leaves the oracles whispered; the sacred tree of the Druids, venerated by the Christians in the Middle Ages, is symbolic of traditions dear to the Basque. It was beneath the oak of Guernica,—that *Guernakaco arbola* sung by the peasant poet José Maria Iparraguirre in the national hymn, celebrated by Jean Jacques Rousseau, saluted by the brave Tour d’Auvergne and his grenadiers in 1794,—it was beneath that oak and the oak at Ustaritz that the Bilzaar, or the assembly of the old, met yearly. This was a congress of notables which was convened in the open air to administer justice and to maintain the laws.

During the Middle Ages the Basque Provinces were states enjoying full liberty, and even when they became part of the kingdoms of France and Spain they still accorded to their sovereigns only a free and voluntary service. The ancient laws, venerated under the name of *fors* in France and *fueros* in Spain, were based on custom or upon written charter. These

## Laws and Language

*fors* embodied the usages, privileges and immunities of the seven provinces, and though they varied in form in each province they did not vary in principle. The key to the Basque laws was respect for individual liberty. There exist in Guipuzcoa certain *cartas pueblas*—or lists of the population—dated as early as 1226, which lead to the belief that the first groups of the people in that province after the great invasions were under the kings of Castille, but that these communal groups jealously guarded their *fueros*, the laws which they had held from time immemorial. Later the deputies met in one or another of the twenty-three towns of the province, and the first *junta* was held July 6, 1397, in the marvellous ogival church of San Salvador at Guetaria, when the *fueros* of Guipuzcoa were first tabulated under fifty or sixty headings.

In the *fueros*, in the *juntas*, in the elections of deputies, there was a constant mingling of religion and pure democracy. Before the election there was a mass, and the elected took his oath upon the cross. The *juntas* were presided over by the Alcalde of the place, sometimes a simple workman, or fisherman, as at Fontarabia. So, at Azcoitia, a tailor presided over a meeting where the proudest nobles of Spain were seated. Great care was also taken to secure honesty at the polls. At Tolosa, any man seen talking politics with a priest lost his right to vote.

As every family was represented by its chief in the commune, so every commune was represented by



## The Basque Country

a delegate at the congress. The Basque delegates took the oath giving to their overlord the right to protect them in these words : “ We who can will and do more than you, we make you our sovereign that you may protect us and that you may maintain our laws.”

The sovereign took the oath to respect the laws : “ I swear that I will be a faithful and good sovereign to the people of this land, to each and to all ; I will maintain the *fors*, privileges, customs and usages, *written* or *unwritten* ; I will defend them with my might ; I will render and see justice rendered to the poor as to the rich.”

The peoples, through their representatives, swore “ to aid, counsel and defend ” the sovereign. A contract this, based upon a noble self-respect. Where there is respect for self, there is respect for the rights of others,—in other words, for law. Where there is respect for law, there is union and strength in the nation, order and discipline in the community, fecundity and continuity in the family. The respect for law is one of the secrets of that force which has preserved the Basque people intact through the centuries. Not only had they laws governing the larger issues of life, but also for their social pleasures, their dances, their games, even for their deportment in the street.

The rights of succession in the Basque Provinces are of the most ancient origin and profoundly rooted in the social character. Long before the law of primogeniture was established in other parts of the



A RIVER IN THE BASQUE COUNTRY.





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Pyrenees, it existed in the Basque nation without distinction of class or sex. The eldest born son or daughter was the heir to the property whether of the rich man or the poor man.

The first result of this law is the fixity of the family. The family homestead acquires a personality, becomes an entity giving its name to the dwellers beneath its roof, creating for them not only duties and obligations, but also assuring to them consideration and material prosperity. One of the first things which strikes the traveller in the Basque country is the dignity of life. The ample houses, spaced in valley and on hill and mountain slope, have nothing in common with the ordinary one-storey habitations of the French peasant. These Basque homesteads impress the imagination as the expression of a patriarchal life. They have an air of stability, of dignity and of permanency; they are evidently not the transitory abode of the light-minded who are here to-day and gone to-morrow. They are houses of wide, sheltering roof-tree and wide doorway, of three and four storeys, set in the midst of a domain which includes garden, field, pasture, woodland and vineyard. This domain is considered as a whole, each part being dependent on the others, and it is the family duty and joy to keep this domain intact.

The house is called in Basque *Etcheonda*, or stem-house. In Germany the same expression is found: *Stammhaus*. This is the stem, the sturdy trunk, the family tree, from which the branches shoot. Its

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preservation is the first consideration. Such a house once established, it is necessary to ensure its transmission in order to satisfy that ambition for permanence which is a Basque characteristic. This, then, is the origin of the Basque laws of succession. Up to the time of the French Revolution, which brought all the provinces of France under one code, the eldest child inherited house and domain. "The result of this was that the eldest, if a son, identified himself from his early youth with his father whose old age he would sustain, and worked with ardour to save enough money to make dowries for his sisters, that they might marry with men of a fortune equal to that of their brothers. The younger sons who remained at home, received a share of the stock on their marriage to heiresses of other houses. But more often than not, the younger sons left to seek their fortune in the colonies, which, when made, enabled them to return to their native place, build homesteads, and found, in their turn, mother houses."

When the Revolution, in 1793, ordained that children must inherit equally, the Basque people used every means to evade the law. The younger children were so imbued with the reverence for the old ideas that they refused to share equally with their elders. It was found so difficult to enforce the law that it was finally changed and the eldest child might be given a quarter of the whole. But law does not change tradition. The parents still use every means to ensure the protection of the property, and the younger

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children still refuse to accept a share which may destroy the continuity of the home.

There is no longer any law of primogeniture, but the father and mother choose their heir, who is always, by custom, the eldest son or daughter. The eldest daughter is often preferred, because she will marry earlier and often meets "an American," or wealthy Basque returned from South America, who will build up the family fortunes. The daughter, moreover, will live with her parents, and is often chosen because the mother knows her character and has more confidence in her as a house-mate than an unknown daughter-in-law.

One interesting point about these customs of succession is that the other children are never jealous of the one chosen to carry on the family. They understand that it is not from any preference for the one chosen, but with the sole aim of ensuring the persistence of the family domain, and so, the importance of the family in the country.

The laws of succession as they exist to-day are only a feeble picture of those which flourished in old times, but they yet maintain the evidence of a magnificent social organisation. Created to assure the stability of the patrimony and homestead, they assure at the same time the continuance of tradition; they also are favourable to the progress of civilisation. Instead of quarrelling over the shreds of their patrimony, the children accept the lot which is theirs by custom; one only carries on the family in the old homestead, one



## The Basque Country

or two marry in the neighbourhood, the others go into the priesthood, the army, or to the colonies. The result is that peace reigns in these quiet, spacious dwellings. The Basque homesteads are homes of peace. How often has one seen engraved in stone above the door, in Basque, the words, "May peace be in this house." Or that other at St. Etienne de Baïgorry, "Cutiare quin dugun, Baquia asqui dugula," which means, "With little, have we but peace, it is enough." This peace is not only the result of living under wise laws, true to traditions handed down from the remotest times, it has its roots, as well, in a deep religious belief. Since St. Amand brought Christ to the Basques in 631, they have held the faith. *Eschaldene Fededen*, "Basques and faithful," stands synonymous. The family life is animated by respect amounting to reverence for the authority of the father in things general, and for the authority of the mother in the household. The position of the woman has always been an honoured one among this people, and a high ideal of morality has been held and attained. The Basque language has no word for adultery, and public opinion condemns with the utmost severity any laxity of morals.

A curious instance of the vigorous manner in which the community guards the standard of propriety came to our notice at St. Jean-Pied-de-Port in May 1919. Night was made hideous by cat-calls, drums, whistles, trumpets. It was not till this had continued for several evenings that we succeeded in discovering

## Laws and Language

the cause. A woman of sixty in the old town was about to marry a man of twenty-seven from a neighbouring village, and all the youth of the place were engaged for a week in thus pleasantly giving voice to the general disapprobation. The woman, who was rich but miserly, was told that she could buy them off for 500 francs to spend in feasting. As she did not pay, the *charivari*, as it is called, continued nightly for a week. Any house suspected of impropriety may be thus pleasantly serenaded.

It was on the little steam tram winding carefully around the steep hills between Oloron and Tardets that a fellow-traveller, a French buyer of wood for the government, became communicative. He was no great admirer of the Basques. He allowed them to be sober, honest, industrious and domestic, but one scented the bitterness of battles waged with hard-headed peasants in many a little mountain town. All his life he had passed in this business of travelling and appraising and acquiring trees and woods and forests,—a detestable vocation which barred him from any very high degree of sympathy. But he had found his ignorance of the Basque tongue such a disadvantage that he had determined that his two little boys should learn it early. To this end, he had installed two Basque servants who were to *faire le ménage*—he allowed them to be clean and ready workers—and to speak Basque with the children. They gave the utmost satisfaction in the first capacity, but the children did not learn a word of Basque. The

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mistress remonstrated with the maids, who replied that they would certainly not speak their language to the children. They did not wish the children to learn Basque, for in that case *strangers* would understand what they said.

This little story is, one feels, typical of the spirit which has preserved this people. They will serve you, they are always polite and pleasant, but they will not allow you to share their lives or to speak their language, which is to know their thoughts. The very difficulty of its idiom has kept the world outside its barriers. In France the spoken limits of the Basque language are the same to-day as they have been for centuries, but in Spain it has lost ground. In Alava it will soon be an unknown tongue; Biscaye is penetrated by the Spanish patois; Navarre has seen, during the past century, over two hundred towns and villages exchange Basque for Spanish.

The Basque language possesses a scale of fifty-three sounds with six vowels, *a, e, i, o, u, ü*. The written language, though based on French or Spanish orthography, is phonetic. Although one of the oldest forms of speech, it has a meagre literature. The first Basque book was printed as late as 1545. For this reason rules for the writing of the language may be said to still be in the making. This was amusingly proved one evening at St. Jean-Pied-de-Port. We had before us a verse in the Basque of the sixteenth century, and the same verse in modern Basque. We asked our hostess, an intelligent, educated woman, to translate

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the modern Basque. Part of it she rendered into French, but some of the words she said she did not know. She thought it must be Basque of another province. She called in a lad who read the verse with the same result. Then they both read the verse written in the sixteenth-century Basque and translated it with ease. This was the Basque that they knew, and they assured us that the second version was mis-spelt. So here, to-day, in St. Jean are people who use the written form of the sixteenth century instead of the modern orthography.

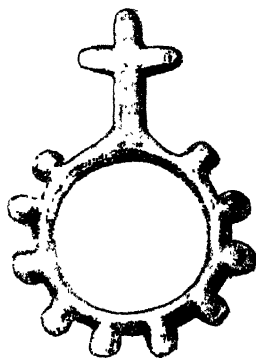
The Basque language (*Eskura*) means "clearly speaking," and has been compared by its admirers to algebra, whose elements are simple, but whose combinations are innumerable. It is declared by them to be a model of clarity and simplicity, order and logic. All of this must be taken by the layman at second hand. But we may accept the fact that the language is unrelated to any other known and is believed to be a mother tongue. The language has no words for utensils brought into use in modern times. For such, a Latin, French or Spanish word is used with a Basque termination. As an example, the word fork, *fourchette* in French, becomes "four-chetta." A knife, however, which was a primitive implement, has a Basque name and is called *nabela*.

The Béarnais have a little story which they like to tell. The good God, they say, wishing to punish the devil for the temptation of Eve, sent him to the Pays Basque with the command that he should

## The Basque Country

there remain until he had mastered the language. At the end of seven years, God relented, finding the punishment too hard, and called the devil to come to Him. The devil had no sooner crossed the bridge of Gastelondo than he found he had forgotten all that he had so hardly learned.

As for the Basques themselves, they believe that they descend from Adam and that the Basque tongue was spoken in the Garden of Eden.



## CHAPTER III

### *THE GATE OF THE BASQUE COUNTRY*

**B**AYONNE is one of the pleasantest of the smaller towns of France and yet it is difficult to explain just why. Can we ever define the charm of a given place any more than we can the attraction of certain personalities? Places are sympathetic or not, as the case may be, and whether that quality is in them or whether we bring it to them, is another question which we cannot answer.

There is always a dual character in the old towns of the world. There is the present-day life, which we see and feel, and there is the shadowy life which history has made so real that in some places it takes possession of the present and we only live in the past. To-day in Bayonne life is vivid and full of pleasantness, but it has its past, its pride of history.

It leaves upon the memory the impress of sun and white houses green-shuttered, of space and light and happy people. It is not all of France, this town, but has more than a hint of Spain. If you lean from your balcony in the steep street in the Quartier St. Esprit, that has lured you across the river from the hotels where one never sees anything but other people like oneself,—if you lean from your balcony to watch

## The Basque Country

the life below, you will believe yourself in Spain. There is the wine shop, where hang the acrid goat-skin wine bottles, ready to be filled from the great casks of Spanish wine; strings of red peppers sway by the door of the house where a black-haired girl sings all day long as she works. Strange little songs she sings, sad songs in a young voice, songs of her people, full of melancholy. *Charinoak Kaiolau*, the Captive Bird, is one.

The little bird in its cage sings a sad song. While it has enough to eat and to drink,—it yet longs for the free air. Because—because—liberty is good.

“Little bird flying free—beware of the cage. If you can, keep free. Because—because liberty is good.”

Last night I dreamt of my beloved. I saw him, but I could not speak. What sorrow! what despair! I wished that I were dead.

Yet though she sings this lament, her voice is full of joy because her lover has come safe home from the war. He is the young blacksmith at the forge above, where the little donkeys stand on market days. There you may see the great cream-coloured patient oxen slung up to be shod. When the night falls, the blacksmith comes down the hill, his blue *béret* on the side of his handsome head, to join the little songstress and her neighbours. He has a brave tenor voice and knows many of the ancient *chansons*, which he has learnt from the old people in his village under the pass of Ste. Engrâce. Legends in verse they are, like the *guerz* of the Breton peasant, though the

## The Gate of the Basque Country

Basques are not as rich as the Bretons in historical ballad. A favourite song is *Errege Jan*. Would you could but hear it sung in the Basque tongue in that thrilling young voice, amidst the charmed silence of the street!

King John wounded has returned from the wars. His Madame mother meets him at the threshold, joyful. "King John, be consoled, enter bravely. Your wife of a little King, last night, was delivered."

"Neither for my wife, nor for the little King may I be comforted, Mother. Do not tell them, but give me my bed to die."

"Madame my mother, what troubles the servants to so many sighs and tears?" "Impossible, my daughter, to hide the truth. The grey horse is dead."

"Madame my mother, what troubles the servants to so many sighs and tears?" "Impossible, my daughter, to hide the truth. They have broken a silver dish. But I beg you, weep not for a grey horse, nor for a silver dish, King John will bring back from the wars both gold and silver."

"Madame my mother, listen—what are the people chanting?" "My daughter, it is nothing. Only a procession that passes below."

"Madame my mother, what dress shall I wear? It is time I arose from this bed." "My daughter, shall it be white or red? or perhaps black is more beautiful."

"Madame my mother, why is the holy ground piled so high?" "Impossible, my daughter, to hide the truth. King John lies buried there." "Madame my mother, take here the keys, both of silver and gold. And the little King, lift him tenderly."

"Oh, holy ground, open to me, that I may enter into thy depths. The grave has opened and I have found King John."

The hush holds for a moment after the song has ended, then there is applause and more talk and laughter under the stars.



## The Basque Country

All down our street is colour: houses, ochre and lemon, yellow and pink and red, and set like a jewel is the fruit shop, glowing in the sun. Beyond are drinking shops, where the sailors from the port sit by the small, square tables and recount long tales of the whole round world; and then come shops, little shops where cakes are sold, and little shops full of things to lure seafarers—yellow oilskins and gaudy handkerchiefs printed with the whole pack of Spanish playing-cards. Beyond on the little green square, under the arcades, more sailors sit and stare at the peasants coming in to market, as they pass by and over the Pont St. Esprit.

Beyond the bridge, the twin spires of the Cathedral rise above the modern town of Bayonne, above the remains of the Roman city of Lapurdum, the headquarters in the third century of the cohort that guarded the *Novem Populanie* of which we may believe that the Basques formed one.

In the fourth century the Roman town was a stronghold, surrounded by walls, of which portions still exist. In the twelfth century the name of the town was changed to *Baïonna*, but the Roman name, *Lapurdum*, continues to this day in that of the province *Labourd*.

Bayonne formed part of the vast possessions of the dukes of Aquitaine, and was brought by the marriage, in 1152, of Eleanor of Aquitaine to the English King Henry II as part of her dower. What a dower it was! "A territory containing every variety of soil



FRUIT SHOP, BAYONNE.





## The Gate of the Basque Country

and of natural characteristics, from the flat rich pastures of Berri and the vineyards of Poitou and Saintonge to the volcanic rocks and dark chestnut woods of Auvergne, the salt marshes, sandy dunes, barren heaths and gloomy forests of the Gascon coast and the fertile valleys which open between the feet of the Pyrenees." When we realise the welter of races in that territory, Gaul, Roman, Saracen, Gascon, Angevin, and how many others, the preservation of the Basque race and language seems a miracle, due however, as we have seen, to their own inherent qualities.

Bayonne found the English rule both just and kind, and resisted the French attacks, though it fell in 1451 to Dunois, who took it in the name of his sovereign, Charles VII.

The importance of Bayonne arose in its earliest days from its position at the confluence of the Adour and the Nive. Its port harboured a growing fleet when in the fifteenth century the Adour changed its course and blocked the harbour. That disaster transferred much of the commerce to St. Jean de Luz, which greatly flourished in consequence; but, fortunately for Bayonne, the original course of the river was re-established in the sixteenth century and with it the prosperity of the town. One is glad, because one cannot think of Bayonne fallen on evil days. It is so cheerful, with its arcaded Rue du Port Neuf, lined with the gayest of confectioners' shops and *pâtisseries*, where you may eat marvellous cakes and

## The Basque Country

drink tea and watch the people pass. Even the Cathedral square is not dingy, but small and bright, and the Cathedral of Ste. Marie has many tales to tell of life from the thirteenth century down; of royal visitors and gorgeous thanksgivings—did not Francis I and, later, Isabella of Castile and the little princes return thanks to God in this place? You may wander happily in the cloister with its beautiful pointed arches; you may revel in the sixteenth-century glass of St. Jerome's Chapel, partly because it was given by that little Dauphin returning from captivity in Madrid; you may watch the trickling stream of people, old and young, who come to pray; and you will pause before the Chapel of Jeanne d'Arc, where the great wreath and the flag of France stand to the dead who gave their lives that this Cathedral and others like it might remain; and then you may wander softly out and find your own way, past the old curiosity shop, by an arch, on to the green-grassed ramparts, where you may walk under the huge elms, past Spanish-looking houses, by the Rue Tour-de-Sault, down to the Quai des Basques along the Nive. If you cross the bridge you may follow the arcades along the Quai Galuperie to the Musée.

It is a great advantage in such a town as Bayonne to have some place of refuge for the possible rainy day—and that you will find in the Musée Bonnat. The building itself is a gift of the painter Léon Bonnat to his native town, and seldom do you have the luck to come upon as interesting a collection of pictures

## The Gate of the Basque Country

as is the small one which it houses. It will prove a resource for many an odd hour, and each time you will get more pleasure from the carefully chosen pictures. In the first room there are a number of delightful pencil portraits by Ingres, full of distinction and charm ; and each school of painting is represented by one or more examples of its masters.

The centre of life in Bayonne is the Place de la Liberté, where the town takes the air. It is a cheerful crowd, animated by the exuberance of gesture and vivid expression of the Midi ; soldiers and Spaniards, Basques in *béret*, Frenchmen, bareheaded girls of the people and neat modish women of the middle classes pass and repass, or sit at the café tables under the arcades, waiting perhaps for the opening of the cinema or the play in the big arcaded building which forms one side of the Place.

Then suddenly, while you sit there drinking your coffee and listening with mild amusement to the discussion between two smart French cavalry officers of the decoration which has suddenly blossomed on every American breast, the past rises like some submerged stratum from your memory and blots out the present. You are back in the year 1565 on this very spot, one of the crowd pressing to the great tournament which Catherine de Medici and her son Charles IX are offering to Elizabeth, wife of Philip II of Spain, who has come here, with the Duc d'Albe in her train, to meet her royal mother and brother. Though it is the sixteenth century and we are of the



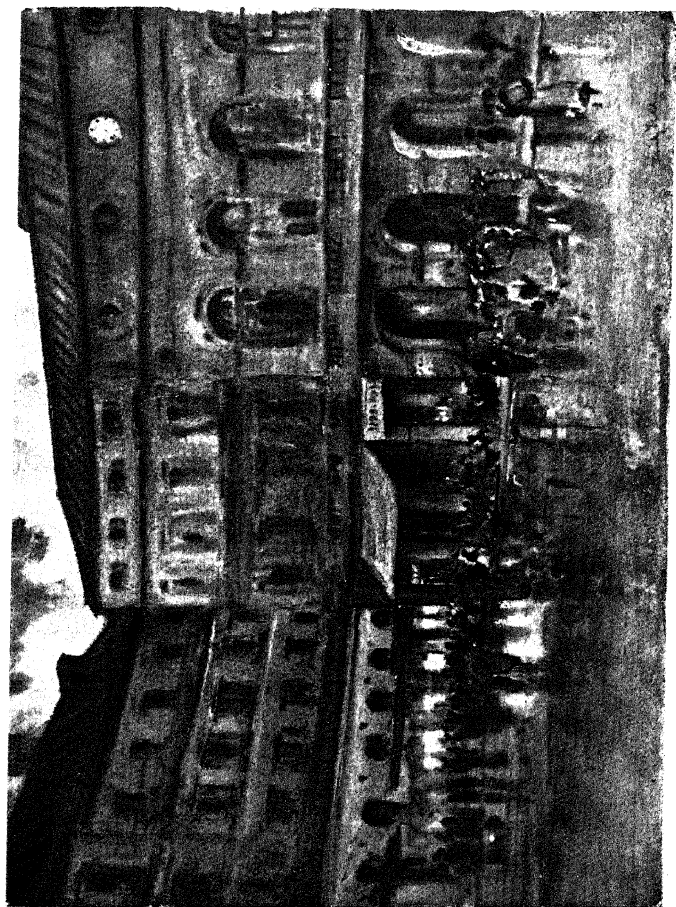
## The Basque Country

crowd craning and pushing for a look first at the Queen Mother and then at the King and the royal visitor, yet remembering historical gossip, there is a deeper scrutiny than that of mere curiosity in our regard. What does the Medici's smiling exterior hide? How well we know that face! "the pale arching eyes, the low brows," the sinister look we have met in the portrait of Maître Clouet. The Duc d'Albe draws near with deep meaning in the glance that crosses hers. Is it of the tournament they are thinking? Is there any interest in these brilliant lists to them? What are games to these who plot to-day the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, under cover of the joust, of the celebration of this happy meeting? One looks and gazes. Can it be true? Side by side Elizabeth and Charles, her children, pawns like all who came within her scheme of power, smile and applaud. Do those dark glances meet above their unthinking heads? Which planted the dark thought in the other's mind? Did suggestion here meet inclination, which was to bear horrid fruit in that later butchery? No one can know. The lists are brilliant, and we, of the populace, have a splendid holiday. The Queen Mother's dress is so gorgeous that we do not see her sinister eyes. The Duc d'Albe moves in a haughty magnificence which blinds. Within the old Roman walls, all is colour, noise, dust and glory: why seek for more?

The officers leave their table with a clink of spurs, and we follow them out to the Place d'Armes, where



PLACE DE LA LIBERTÉ, BAYONNE.





## The Gate of the Basque Country

the tram starts for Biarritz, only a twenty minutes' ride away. It will be cooler there and only pleasant ghosts upon the sands, though on the way you pass that convent of the Bernardines where the white nuns of silence tend their gardens, pleasant places of peace where white periwinkles grow. . . .

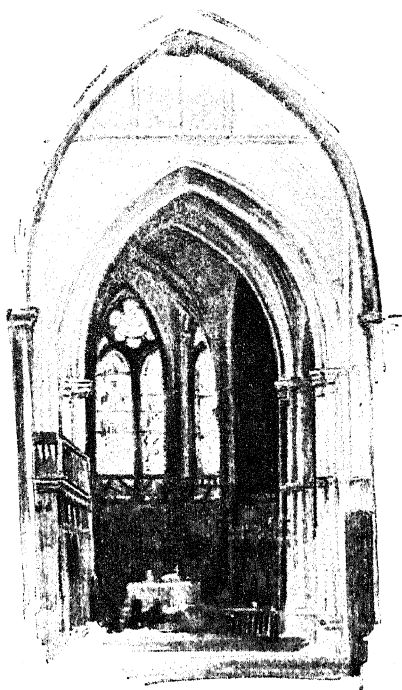
Perhaps one of your most lasting impressions of Bayonne is of a city set in water ways. The Nive and the Adour fold it in, and through the shaded walks of the Allées Maritimes you may follow to where the bar breaks the full rush of the tide from the Bay of Biscay.

In the old days, not so long ago, quite within memory, the old walls, planned by Vauban, still stood, their solid masonry rising from the river and crowned at the angles by watch-towers, of which only one remains, overflowing in June with the luxuriant growth of a white rose tree. That little turret guarded the great mediæval town-gate which stood where now the bridge, Pont St. Esprit, springs from the shore. Legend, which grows quickly around a loved figure, already tells a pretty story of King Edward VII, who, they say, made a royal though unsuccessful effort to save the doomed gate. He failed to awake the powers in Bayonne to a sense of their own vandalism.

The ancient walls were doomed, and so to-day there remains only a length of the old solid masonry surmounted by the little turret to keep guard above the Adour River rolling out to the Bay of Biscay.

## The Basque Country

From the bridge the sun sets behind the turret and the Cathedral spires of an evening, and all the town across the river is misty and palely gold, and the glory runs up the sky above the river and is repeated in the flowing tide.



## CHAPTER IV

### *A MEMORY OF THE SECOND EMPIRE*

IN the Bayonne library, where all is still with that peculiar sense of desertion which seems to pervade the libraries of most provincial towns, you will find a thin pamphlet, a *Souvenir de Biarritz*. It bears the imposing title of *Monographie de la Villa Eugénie*, and its author is one E. Ardouin, and its imprint, Paris 1869. Its faded green cover lettered in gold recalls those keepsakes and tokens of an earlier date in whose steel-engraved pages ringleted beauties of sloping shoulder met with Moors, Giaours and other Byronic heroes.

Biarritz, the little book perfunctorily assures, had a history as early as the tenth century. The writer thereupon dismisses in a paragraph all the centuries of adventure on the wild seas, the riches that poured in here as to St. Jean de Luz, from the hazardous deep-sea fishing, so eager is he to indulge himself in that social history which has, one must admit, established the fame of the little town. With a stroke of his pen he leaps from the tenth century to 1807, to record that the town—which had fallen from its former prosperity with the decline of the fisheries—was



## The Basque Country

lifted to notice, shall we say? by the visit of Queen Hortense Eugénie, wife of Louis Napoleon, lately raised to the throne of Holland by Napoleon I. Napoleon himself visited Biarritz on his way to St. Jean de Luz and Hendaye in 1808, at the time of his visit to Bayonne with the Empress Marie Louise for the crowning of Joseph Bonaparte.

Biarritz did not, however, wake to life, to the life of the real world, till the Carlist troubles in Spain sent many of the Spanish grandees over the border into France. The very names of the noble exiles breathe a poetry, a romance which was probably far from them,—Duc de Montemar, Comte de Altamira, Comtesse de Zaldivar, Comtesse de Toreno, Marquis de Miraflore, and so on and so on, and—the Comtesse de Montijo with her daughter, Amélie de Guzman, Comtesse de Téba, future Empress of the French.

The young Countess must have cherished happy memories of her early days in Biarritz, for in 1853 we find her returning there with the Emperor for two months at the Château de Grammont.

That visit raised Biarritz from a quiet fishing village to a resort of the great world, where kings and princely families, great fortunes, the folly and fashion and flower of that world were to meet.

It is pleasant to think of the lovely young Empress revisiting the places she had known as a child: the shell-shaped cove of the Port Vieux, the sheltered Côte des Basques, and the beach which was to be

## A Memory of the Second Empire

known as the Plage de l'Impératrice. The cliffs, the beach, the gorgeous sunsets, the wild flowers, the golden samphire growing down to the water's edge, the ebbing tide across the sand from the Chambre d'Amour, the watch-tower of L'Attalaye and the Roche Percée, the wood and the little lake of La Négresse,—it must have been just all these which with her memories wove for her the fascination of the little town, so that she lingered on until the Emperor had chosen the site for her villa—the Villa Eugénie—between the lighthouse and the Bains Napoléon decorated “in the Moorish style.”

The work was started in 1854, and M. Ardouin expands and expatiates with awed admiration upon the fairy palace of two hundred rooms which rose upon the cliff. The cour d'honneur, the vestibule, the salons, the various suites of rooms lose nothing at his hands. You share with him the savour of his enjoyment in every catalogued object of use and art.

The hangings of the Empress's bedroom, he tells us, were of “toile perse à raies bleues, dessin petits bouquets de fleurs, roses et camélias.” Persian hangings with a blue stripe, roses and camelias recall in a sentence the whole period of the Second Empire. If anything were needed further to complete the picture it is given in the description of the furniture of *acajou* and *palissandre*, so beautifully the setting for the ladies of the gift-book period. The wardrobe room was lined with oak armoires, and furnished with a large oak table “where the toilettes are pressed and

## The Basque Country

freshened." What billows of tulle, of India muslin, of pineapple gauze, of exquisite finery must that table have known! We know them too, in Winterhalter's portraits, those billows from which arose the graceful figure with the sloping shoulders and small banded head.

M. Ardouin goes on to give us in great detail the account of the guest rooms and the room of the Duchesse d'Albe and the apartments of the ill-starred little Prince Imperial. You may read a full description of every chair and table, every stick of furniture; but the silly man gives us never a portrait. Let us believe that the little Prince was happy there—that they were all happy as they sat in the circular tent of striped awning on the long terrace facing the sea, in their chairs of "imitation bamboo." There would be the Emperor and the Empress, and as guests General MacMahon perhaps, Prince de la Moskowa, Mérimée the poet, Monseigneur de la Villette; and royalty sometimes, the King of Wurtemberg, King Leopold of Belgium, Princess Anne Murat, and Queen Isabella of Spain with the Prince of the Asturias—there was a dinner of forty covers when they came. Brilliant days those. The villa was now surrounded by a park of eleven acres, where 15,000 trees and shrubs were planted. There was stabling for ten horses, and barns for ten cows and forty sheep and two oxen. There was a vineyard and a garden.

In 1864 the Inspecteur Général des Monuments Historiques built the chapel ("in the Moorish style"),

## A Memory of the Second Empire

where three chairs and *prie-dieu* of ebony and gold marked the places of their Majesties. . . .

The villa is now the Palace Hotel. In this season of 1919, you may pay twenty francs for dinner and dance with the boys and girls of the American Expeditionary Force—if you want to. But to many those rooms are still hung with *toile perse* and are filled with the sway of those hoop skirts that billowed there in those far-off days before the *débâcle*.



## CHAPTER V

### *THE CULT OF THE DEAD*

WHEN you finally reluctantly turn your steps from Bayonne to wander farther afield, your first stopping-point will be St. Jean de Luz. Take the train then in the morning as far as Bidart,—your luggage may go on,—walk on to Guéthary, two kilometres, for lunch on the terrace, and take the afternoon train to St. Jean, where you will do well to make your headquarters for a time.

When you get down at the station of Bidart, take the path down the hill to the little valley where you will pass the small grey Chapelle d'Urovca, whose pilgrimage Sunday in May draws the faithful, who come to the sacred fountain to recite their pious litanies and pass a happy day under the trees. From there the path leads you on pleasantly across the fields, by flowering hedgerows, and finally up and over a steep green round hill, which brings you out close under the white walls of the church.


Bidart and its churchyard have a very special charm. May you go there on a day of sun and blue sky, white clouds sailing above, shadows moving across the wide country that stretches away to the

## The Cult of the Dead

mountains. Feathery tamarisks along the grey walls wave their smoky pink plumes, bees hum, swallows dip and dart, and from beneath your feet arises the pungent breath of thyme. This is the Basque cemetery, *ilerri*, land of the dead, on a hill, bright with flowers, facing the sun. You see that the wall, spaced by yews and rosemary, closing in the church and the grey tombstones, forms an uneven circle, a symbol of eternity, from ancient times, for the *culte des morts* in the Basque country leads you back to strange beginnings. The tombs on this quiet hillside are under the protection of the Queen of the Earth, the moon, who sheds her "light of the dead" upon these abodes of peace.

As you wend your way between the flower-set graves, fragments that you have read recur to you. Here are the curious discoid stones, whose origin is traced to the round buckler placed by the Assyrians, by the Egyptians, and later by the Greeks and Romans, above the warrior's tomb. Oddly barbaric they look, these rude stone discs mounted upon a pyramidal base which represents the celestial mountain of all ancient mythologies. The date of the discoid stone is placed from the eighth to the seventeenth centuries. One side of the disc, that away from the grave, you will find, bears some conventional design; that towards the grave has an inscription in Spanish, Latin, French or Basque. On the more ancient stones, the inscription is around the edge of the circle; the later stones show it in the centre.

## The Basque Country

In the Bidart churchyard many of the discoid stones bear a large roughly-cut Maltese cross, interesting enough as recalling the fact that the Commandery of Malta held jurisdiction here. But in other graveyards you will find other designs upon these stones which, puzzling you at first, will, as you spell their meaning, lead you on long roads back through and beyond the Middle Ages, by dead civilisations, Egypt, Assyria, Chaldea, to the rites of our earliest Pagan forbears. Such a symbol is this zigzag—the lightning—cut across the stone disc which you will find in the cemetery at Itxassou. Here, too, is the sacred *Swastika* of India, the *tomoyé* of Japan, and everywhere you find the sun, symbol of regeneration, immortality, eternity, in endless combination with the cross.

Finding these symbols clustered about some such modest church as this at Bidart on a sunny day, with soft airs stirring the bright flowers, you will experience the strangest thrill, the same half-sad, keen, almost-there feeling that you had sometimes as a child. If only these symbols could speak, what secrets, what marvellous stories they could tell! But, however deeply you are stirred, however long you gaze at the rough red-brown discs in the deep grass, they are silent still. Form and line have a power that we little dream of, but the ancients knew and the moderns are striving to regain that knowledge.

Prior to the eighth century an upright tabular stone was used, of which some still remain in Biscaye,

## The Cult of the Dead

carved with the serpent, the tree, the pyramid or other primitive mythical design.

The crosses which spring up everywhere amongst the climbing roses on the warm hill date from the seventeenth century. They are often ornamented with the chalice rayed with light, the seven-branched candlestick, the sun and the moon. Usually the arms are not squared, but are rounded ornately. The crosses of to-day are often made of white wood with the design and inscription in black. The wording in Basque would run as follows :

HEMENDA EHORCIA  
MARTIN HIRIGOYEN  
HILA, ECAINAREN, 22.  
72, URTHE AN.

Retracing your way up the hill, you will notice on the wall of the church an interesting tablet which states that Bertrand La Fargue and Simon de Larregui built this church in 1610, and under the wide and roomy porch, which is a feature of all Basque churches, you will find on the floor a slab over the La Fargue tomb with the date 1618. Near it is a long stone which reads : "Monument de la Maisonde Garaicot," the tomb of the *house* of Garaicot. Again and again you will find as you go on through the Basque country, on many a stone that legend which marks the resting-place in perpetuity of the dwellers in the earthly house whose name it bears.

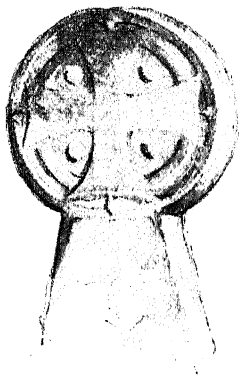


## The Basque Country

These stones in the floors of the porches, or often set in the paving of the church itself, are called *Yarleku* and upon them the women of the family kneel on black praying rugs saying prayers for the dead. In the tabular stone, the grave and the *Yarleku*, students see the menhir, the tumulus and the dolmen (altar) of our prehistoric ancestors. It is certain that even to-day votive offerings of bread and wax are made at a funeral—food and light for the departed on his long journey—bread to the poor, wax for candles in the mass.

Everywhere in this country you feel yourself touching hands with remote and shadowy figures, half guessed at through the mists of time. That strange round dimple in the stone on the floor of the porch is a symbol which is found in the dolmens of Brittany, on the Pyramids of Egypt, in India, in China, a symbol which has outlasted empires. What does it mean—eternity, time, the sun? Who knows?

And still the  
the swallows dip  
the white clouds  
on the cliff top,  
from the village  
the cross—sym-  
two thousand



bees hum and  
and dart and  
float above, and  
a short walk  
square, stands  
bol for a short  
years. . . .

## CHAPTER VI

### ST. JEAN DE LUZ

“ **I** CI l’homme faict ce que peut et fortune ce qu’elle veut.” This old motto carved above the door of the house in the rue St. Jacques, built in 1636, by Jean de Casabielha, the bailiff of the town, seems prophetic of the fortune of the little town itself. Man has done here what he could, has builded with the riches wrested from the sea great houses, bridges, ports and breakwaters—yet time and fortune have done their will, and the charm of the place lies in its feeling of a past. It is rich in that spirit of place which is felt but not explained. There are villas on the hills and through-trains from Paris, a fine golf-course, an English church and pleasant society; but these are adjuncts to the real St. Jean de Luz, which settles down on a wide bay with its arms at the points of Socoa and Ste. Barbe; a bay which is the *débouchement* of the Nivelle, a river leading back in level sweeps and bends through a wide valley to the encircling mountains. Sea and river and mountain in combination—that is to say, all imaginable beauty of atmospheric effect.

St. Jean de Luz owes whatever of history there is in its past to its position, between the towns of Bayonne

## The Basque Country

and Hendaye, on the road which follows the plain from France into Spain. Sovereigns seldom journeyed over the mountain passes, but along this lowland route to where the Bidassoa River divides the two countries and the Ile des Faisans provides a neutral meeting ground.

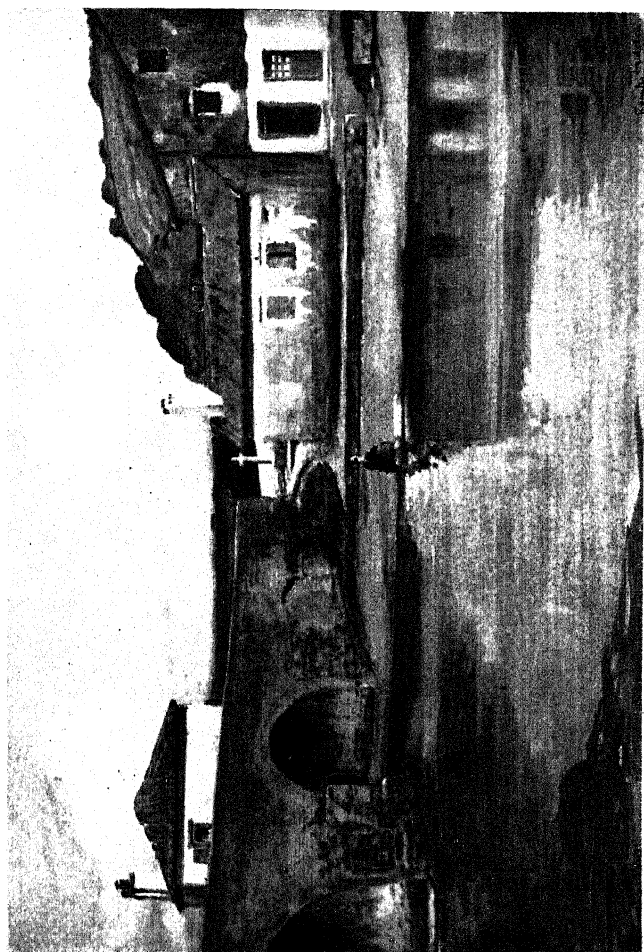
Early in the twelfth century the barony of St. Jean de Luz was presented by Bertrand, Vicomte de Labourd, to the Cathedral at Bayonne, and this gift was confirmed by Pope Clement VI in 1194; it was not till 1570 that the little town bought its freedom from the Chapter at Bayonne for 2,000 livres.

In 1462 King Louis XI on one of his many journeys, this time to the Château d'Urturbie, to mediate between those constant enemies, the Kings of Castille and Aragon, visited the town and, as one old chronicler says, was received by "his loved and loyal subjects." The shrewd king was quick to grasp the importance to the crown of this energetic people, already masters of a fleet which brought riches in its wake. He granted the town exemption from taxation on their merchandise, "which they may sell at St. Jean or elsewhere, with the right of free exit and entry, which they may carry by sea or land, free of all duty."

These generous privileges were amplified by Louis XII in 1498. "The inhabitants are to be free of all duty anywhere in the kingdom." Although these privileges were somewhat curtailed under Louis XIV and Louis XV, they were confirmed in 1784,



BRIDGE AT SOCOA.





## St. Jean de Luz

and St. Jean de Luz remained a free town as long as the French monarchy lasted.

There is gorgeous reading in the old archives of Bayonne, when you turn to the roll of "nobles, squires, knights and others 'holding' fief under the King" in Labourd. It tells how the royal herald would ride into the town square and, after sounding his trumpet three times, read in a loud voice, in the presence of the assembled notables and folk, the quota of men called to the King's service. Labourd had to furnish 1,000 men-at-arms. St. Jean de Luz raised a company with a banner. Every lord of every château around was on that roll: the Sieur de St. Pée was down for one man-at-arms and one archer, so too the Sieur d'Espelette and the Seigneur d'Urturbie, while men of lesser consequence furnished one man-at-arms or one archer.

Thus it was that the men of St. Jean de Luz took part in the Spanish border wars, and assisted at the assault of the Château of Irun and the taking of Fontarabia in 1522.

In 1526 the Alcazar in Madrid was the grim prison of a King of France. Francis I, that *preux chevalier* and patron of the arts, after the disaster of Pavia was a captive in the hands of Charles V, who, as we know, demanded the duchy of Burgundy as the price of his freedom. Ill with a grave malady and worn with captivity, Francis I, believing a forced promise to be no promise, feigned to consent to this hard condition. That he might gain the ratification



## The Basque Country

of his parliament, he was given his freedom on two conditions,—first, that his two young sons should be sent into Spain as hostages for his good faith, and, second, that he should marry Eleanor of Austria, sister of Charles V. A betrothal by proxy, considered as sacred as a marriage, took place before Francis I returned to France. He re-entered his kingdom at Hendaye, but as the Emperor had forbidden, in the terms of the agreement, any demonstration on the French shore, the monarch was received by a handful of gentlemen only, and it was not until he entered St. Jean de Luz that he was met by a burst of popular acclamation which drew from him the heartfelt words, “ Ah ! I am still King of France ! ”

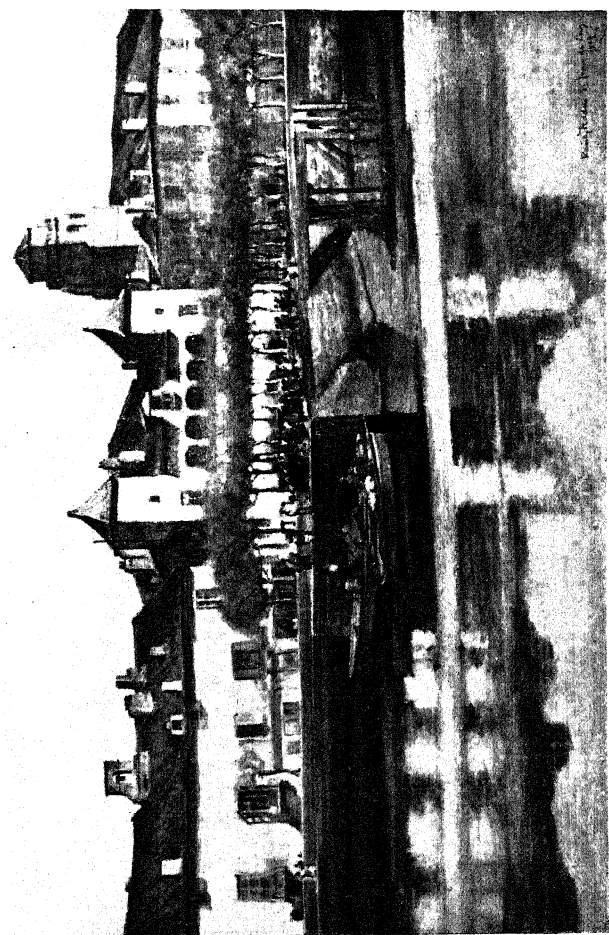
We know what followed ; how Francis, once back in his kingdom, repudiated his oath, refused to fulfil his promise, leaving his two sons captives and his affianced bride languishing in Spain.

Soon, however, a strong coalition formed against Charles V, and in the treaty of Cambrai the Emperor renounced his pretensions to Burgundy, exacting in its place the sum of 2,000,000 écus, on payment of which Francis I should receive both his sons and his bride.

The treaty was signed in 1529, and on January 20 of that year the good folk of St. Jean de Luz beheld the entry of the Vicomte de Turenne with a train of 300 horsemen travelling as emissary from Francis I to Queen Eleanor. Scarcely had this brilliant cavalcade halted in the little Place, when a second entered



LOHOBIAGUE, ST. JEAN DE LUZ.





## St. Jean de Luz

from the opposite side. This was Messire Louis de Flandres, Seigneur de Praët, Knight of the Golden Fleece, on his way from Charles V to superintend the counting of the ransom at Bayonne.

Francis I had appointed no less a personage than the Connétable Anne de Montmorency to guard his interests in the transfer of what was for those days an enormous sum of money.

At Bayonne the two representatives met at the Château Vieux and the Seigneur de Praët inspected and weighed and appraised the treasure there amassed : the two mountains of shining écus, 300,000 in one pile, 600,000 in the other, displayed upon brilliant carpets ; the sixty sacks full of gold pieces of all sorts, nobles-à-la-rose, angelots, ducats, alphonsines, rixdales, florins, philippes ; the 100,000 pieces of pure silver ; and the jewels, including the famous fleur-de-lis in diamonds containing a piece of the true cross.

“Messieurs,” said de Montmorency grandiloquently to the Spaniards, “you see how the King, wishing to carry out the terms of peace, prepares to make payment to the Emperor for the ransom of their Royal Highnesses his children. It is indeed better to employ the treasure in this manner than in making war and causing bloodshed.”

Meanwhile the young Princes, who had been closely guarded in the fortress of Pedrazza de la Sierra, not only against possible surprise by arms, but against witchcraft, were entrusted to Don Pedro Hernando de Velasco who should escort them to the frontier.

## The Basque Country

It is an amusing sign of the times that while de Velasco feared that de Montmorency would endeavour to seize the royal children while keeping the ransom, de Montmorency mistrusted that de Velasco would seize the treasure without surrendering the hostages. In order to guard against any such foul play on either side, the most minute precautions were taken, and that he might superintend the preparations more closely de Montmorency took up his abode for three weeks at St. Jean de Luz. Hither came the heavy carts from Bayonne laden with provisions—food and fodder—for 4,000 men and 2,000 horses; from the sea came boats freighted with fish; from the hills came the wine of Navarre; from the country for miles around came the peasant girls laden with milk, eggs, fruit and vegetables. The streets and drinking shops were full of soldiers, and couriers came and went at a gallop with dispatches to and from the Court or carrying messages between the King at Bordeaux and Eleanor on her progress now from Toledo to her royal lover.

Turenne, returning from his gallant mission, passed through, and after him came the slow-moving pack trains, hundreds of mules gaily caparisoned, loaded with riches and precious objects, the wardrobes of the Queen and her ladies.

Then comes the news that the Queen herself has reached the bank of the Bidassoa. The Connétable de Montmorency, representing the State, and the Cardinal de Tournon, representing the Church,

## St. Jean de Luz

journey the eight miles in pomp, to pay their homage.

Finally all is ready for the great exchange which is to take place on June 30 at high tide—eight in the morning—on the river, midway between Fontarabia and Hendaye.

There was not much rest that last night in St. Jean de Luz. Part of the gorgeous troop of 400 men which had come from Bayonne to escort de Montmorency was obliged to camp at Guéthary, as St. Jean was full.

The sixty pack mules, with a strong guard, bearing the treasure in coffers sealed with the royal seals of France and Spain, arrived from Bayonne, and the coffers were lodged in de Montmorency's house under the custody of one Don Alvaro de Fugo and his Spaniards, who slept by the treasure. There were French sentries, however, guarding them, within and without the house.

In the evening de Montmorency proclaimed through the town the royal command that, the next day, no one, under pain of death, should cross the bridge of St. Jean de Luz on the road to Spain. An hour after midnight the trumpets sounded for the assembly, and at three o'clock in the morning the head of the cavalcade started for Hendaye. Cavalry led the march, followed by foot-soldiers, then came the mules bearing the ransom, each with a guard of four men. The Connétable de Montmorency was next in the line, dressed in black velvet and gold and magni-



## The Basque Country

ficiently mounted, followed by forty picked gentlemen, and 500 men-at-arms closed the procession, lance in rest.

When the brilliant cortège arrived at the bank of the river at Hendaye it was seven o'clock and the boats rocked on the rising tide, but there was no sign of life across the waters at Fontarabia. The old Spanish town seemed quite asleep. Misinformed by their spies, the Spaniards refused to come out, fearing treachery, until de Montmorency sent the Spaniards in his company as witnesses to his good faith.

Owing to this delay the exchange did not take place till eight at night. A wearisome day of waiting it must have been to the Queen and the little Princes.

When the hour finally arrived, the exchange was carried out with scrupulous regard for etiquette. The boats, one containing the treasure, the other the royal children, left the opposite shores at the same instant, met in mid-stream, exchanged their precious cargoes and returned. It was not till then that the Queen's barge put out from the shore, and Eleanor of Austria set her foot on French soil soon after the young Princes.

It was now late and the return procession was soon under weigh, the Queen in her litter of cloth of gold, the little Princes—the Dauphin and the Duc d'Orléans—on horseback, and the ladies and maids of honour mounted sideways on mules in the Spanish fashion. As the night air grew chill the Queen, realising the fatigue of the children, took them with her in the

## St. Jean de Luz

litter. It was already dark, when suddenly from far down the road came the sound of cheering which heralded the approach of 500 young men of St. Jean de Luz bearing torches. They came down the long road, the torches flaming in the night and lighting up the way, surrounded the litter and, turning, bore it on a wave of light onward past the Château d'Urturbie, through Ciboure to the bridge over the Nivelle, where they were met by the clergy of the town with cross and holy water singing the *Te Deum*.

On every height flamed welcoming bonfires, the boats in the harbour were ablaze with lights, and from every side rang out the cries: "France, France! Vive le Roi! Vive la Reine! Vive le Dauphin!" The ladies of St. Jean pressed close, in their great coifs, torch in hand, and in the bright light all the crowd could see the Queen and the Princes. The joy and enthusiasm were redoubled at the sight of the pale dark lady with the kind and charming expression, with the little boys in gala dress beside her.

What a night that must have been for the town! The tired travellers supped in comfort and went early to bed, so the chronicles say. But de Montmorency was busy sending couriers forth to England, to Venice and to the other powers, bearing the glad news of the return of the children and the arrival of the Queen.

It was in the afternoon of the next day that the grand cavalcade took the road to Bayonne, and one would think that, however loyal and devoted, the

## The Basque Country

good people of the town must have breathed a sigh of relief at the prospect of a return to a normal existence. And what a clearing-up there must have been!

Henri IV, who made history in Béarn, brought prosperity to the Basque country as to all France, but there is no note of his turning the town upside down. Perhaps he came *incognito* the better to enjoy the games and the dances *à la mode basque*.

Later there was more pomp and circumstance in St. Jean de Luz when both Anne of Austria and Elizabeth of France stopped in the town, as they journeyed, the one to become the wife of Louis XIII, the other to be the consort of Philip II of Spain.

Charles IX, the weak and vicious son of an intriguing mother, twice stopped in St. Jean de Luz—once when he came to meet his sister Elizabeth, wife of Philip II of Spain, to escort her to Bayonne. The bridge over the Nivelle, we read, was rebuilt, “so that his suite might pass with ease.” We mistrust that the Luzinians paid dearly for the honour of these royal visits.

But none of these royal passers-by has left any imprint on the town. To-day it shines only in the reflected glory of that nuptial journey of Louis XIV, *le grand monarque*. *Le roi soleil* so dazzled the eyes of the town folk that they were blinded to all lesser lights. It was in the old church of St. Jean Baptiste that Louis XIV was married to the Spanish Infanta, Maria Theresa, in 1660. The town was so impressed by the honour that, when the royal pair had passed

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out after the ceremony, the church door was built up and remains so blocked to this day.

Facing the square you will see the house with a turret at each corner known as Lohobiague—house of Louis XIV—where the King lodged. From the dress of the sculptured figures over the windows, it is supposed to date from Henri III or Henri IV. The Infanta and her father lodged before the marriage in the large, square, renovated house with turrets, called the Joancœnia, which stands on the bar, facing the port. It was built in 1641. Above the door you may read the following modern inscription :

L'Infante j'ai reçue l'an mil six cent soixante.  
On m'appelle depuis la maison de l'Infante.

Thanks to the hospitality of the present occupant, many have enjoyed the beauty of the old rooms, their fine proportions, their lozenged and painted ceilings, and the great fireplace bearing the arms of the town where, if the day be chill, a wood fire is sure to be burning.

Near the Joancœnia on the bar are other houses, all of a certain dignity and importance, which speak of the bygone prosperity of the town : the Maison Betheder ; the Maison St. Martin with a tower in the centre and a wrought-iron balcony, date 1713 ; the Maison Pendelet, built in the reign of Louis XV ; the Dasconaguerreau, where Mazarin lodged in 1659 when he came to prepare the way for his royal master's marriage. The oldest house in the town, however,

## The Basque Country

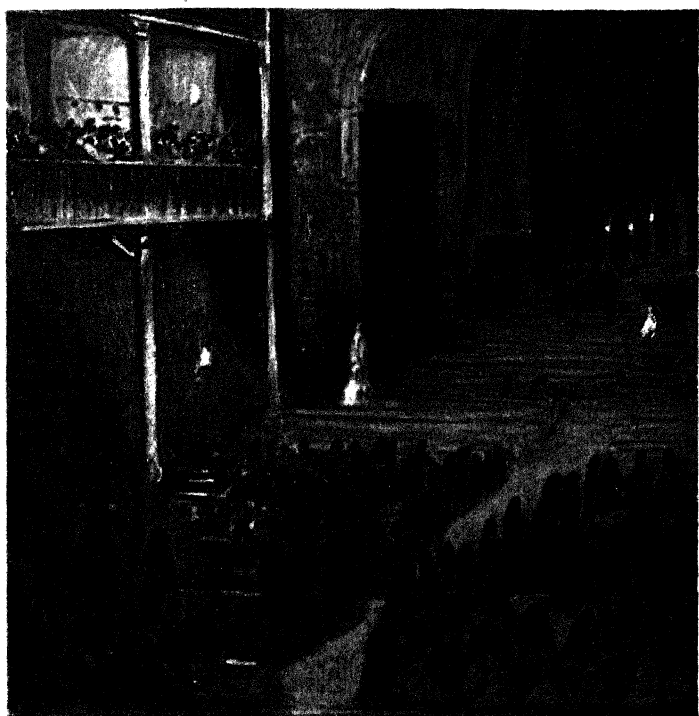
is the Esquerenea, in the Rue Montante, which rears its square tower above its neighbours and which probably dates from the end of the reign of Louis XII. Other houses of interest are the Discontennia, built with gold taken from the English by the brave corsair Duconte ; the one known as Sopite, in the street of that name, and a fine house opposite the church.

The hospital of the town is in the old Chapelle of the Hostel for the pilgrims of St. Jacques de Campos-telle, which was built in 1623 by Joanis de Hareneder and Gracie de Chiba, his wife.

But what facts can give you St. Jean de Luz as does the feeling of an hour ? You must see the town at sunset, its old houses glowing rose and gold, the Nivelle flung like a broad blue ribbon up the valley, La Rhune glorified in its cloudy mantle, the distant mountains fading into purple mystery. You want to see it at that curiously expectant hour before the sun just sets, when for a space it seems lifted into a realm of romance and unreality ; or again, on a day of storm, when the hurricane sweeping in from the Bay of Biscay brings the great mountains of water to smash upon the jetty, sending up towering clouds of spray against the sky, and carries the flood rushing through the narrow entry to the port in large smooth breakers which leap the breakwater and lap the very feet of the houses in Ciboure. Or, best of all, in the old church on the night of Good Friday you may come close to the life of to-day. The gold of reredos and altar is shrouded, the lights are few ; the triple bal-



GOOD FRIDAY EVENING, CHURCH OF ST. JEAN BAPTISTE,  
ST. JEAN DE LUZ.

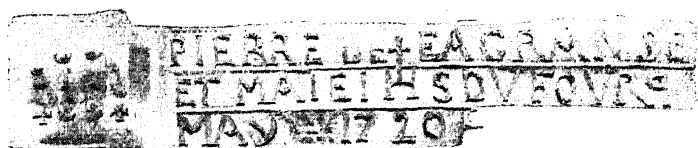






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conies of black oak slowly fill with men and boys béret in hand; below in the nave are the dark silhouetted figures of kneeling women; a votive ship sails beneath the vaulted shadow of the roof; on the shadowed silence falls the voice of the Basque priest recalling once again to his people the old and moving story of the Passion. Then, in the faces above, about you, you may see for a moment that persistent spirit of race which has kept these people separate through the centuries.



## CHAPTER VII

### ST. JEAN DE LUZ—THE PIRATES' NEST

AS you sit under the arcade on the Place Louis XIV, drinking your *orangeade pilée*, and watching the children playing beneath the plane trees in reach of Spanish-looking mothers who gossip upon the low stone seats, you will find, about five o'clock, that interest is centring about the jetty, across the square. There a crowd is steadily growing, men, women and children strolling up from every quarter, waiting for something. Fisher girls, baskets, handcarts, give you the clue. They are awaiting the return of the fishing boats, as they have awaited them for hundreds of years. As the first boat comes shooting into the basin through the narrow passage from the outer bay, a thrill runs through the crowd. There is but one question: "Est-ce que la pêche est bonne?" Everyone crowds out on the jetty. The blue boat comes alongside. There is shouting, curses, laughter. There is great excitement, and you realise then that these people of St. Jean de Luz have the sea in their blood, that the life of the town has depended upon the sea for generations. To-day the catch is good. The war which drew the Basques from their nets

## The Pirates' Nest

has left the deep sea in peace, and those who remain, the few who have returned, reap the sea-harvest.

The sturdy fisher girls press close, lower the fish baskets to be filled from the silver mass in the hold ; the baskets are raised, seized by brown arms, loaded on the two-wheeled push carts, which clatter off down the square and over the bridge to the curing houses in Ciboure, the little town across the basin.

It is not until the last boat has come home that the crowd disperses, still talking of the day's luck. Last to go are the fisher girls with baskets on heads, who will speed away early in the morning to outlying villages and hamlets. Not long ago it was these same hardy women who, starting by daybreak in summer, in their rapid swinging mountain stride, carried their fish twenty or thirty kilometres to market in some little mountain town. There, hot and talkative, but unfatigued, they sold their stock, retailed the news of the war, and returned in the afternoon, thinking nothing of their day's journey.

As your eyes travel along the bar and the water front at Ciboure, you may see in the important houses the visible result of the riches gained in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries upon the sea.

They will tell you here that it was a Basque who, one hundred years before Columbus, discovered the Western Continent. More than that, there is a legend that it was to a Basque that Christopher Columbus owed the inspiration which led to his own discovery of America. The crew of a Basque fishing ship, so

## The Basque Country

the story goes, was ill with scurvy. The pilot put in to a town in the Indies, where Columbus was living. Columbus received this pilot into his house, and when the man died, took possession of his charts and papers, which gave him the Western route which he eventually followed.

Anyway, it is generally believed that the Basques discovered the fishing banks of Newfoundland, and reached the coast of Canada before 1500. From 1520 the records of Bayonne are full of the expeditions to the codfish banks.

During the Middle Ages the sailors of St. Jean de Luz and Ciboure took a brave and dashing part in all the sea-fighting. They formed a large part of the crew of the Bayonne squadron which assisted in the crusade of Richard Cœur-de-Lion; they were present at the siege of Seville, and they helped in the blockade of La Rochelle in 1242.

But it was to the blocking of the port of Bayonne, by the sudden change in the course of the Adour River, that St. Jean de Luz owed its highest point of prosperity. The shipbuilders transferred their activities to St. Jean de Luz. The records of those days run like some wild sea-tale. Here you read that St. Jean de Luz armed six strong ships and sailed for the Bay of Motrico, where they entered under cover of darkness and surprised and boarded a *caraque* laden with merchandise. This they made off with, but the captain of the *caraque* pursued them with six ships from San Sebastian, overhauled them at the entrance

## The Pirates' Nest

to the bay of St. Jean de Luz, and recaptured the *caraque*, after a bloody engagement, in which the captain was killed by a shot from an arquebus. Indeed the Spanish corsairs seem to have had the best of the fighting in the early sixteenth century. They pushed as far as Newfoundland, determined to destroy the French fisheries, and seized many a boat returning laden with codfish. The French reprisals were so severe that the Spanish attempted again and again to destroy the corsairs' nest, and in 1542 and 1558 attacked, burnt and pillaged Ciboure and St. Jean de Luz.

It is interesting to read a description of one of these fishing boats, which when attacked could return blow for blow. In 1552 the *Saint Esprit* from St. Jean de Luz went forth to seek adventure under her Captain du Halde. It was a ship of 120 tons, with forty men, each armed with an arquebus. It carried twenty cannon with powder and bullets, twenty-four pikes, thirty-six small arms, seven small boats, one cask of powder, twenty casks of wine, 120 *quintaux* of biscuits, ten *quintaux* of pork, two and a half of olive oil, twenty-two barrels of vinegar, 120 pounds of tallow candles, one cask of beans, two casks of other food.

From 1535 to 1585 the corsairs of St. Jean de Luz pillaged the shores of Spanish America and swept the seas. In 1625 Louis XIII gave letters patent for the building of four large ships which were constructed in the shipyards of the Nivelle. Their captains bore

## The Basque Country

brave Basque names—Louis de Lohobiague, Jean d'Avetche, Martin de Hirigoyen, Joaquin de Hari-tegary, who were elected by the town and commissioned by the King. These boats were launched in 1627, flying at the masthead, beside the white standard with the fleur-de-lis, the red and yellow pennant, bearing the town arms, known and respected on the high seas.

One of the great filibusters of the sixteenth century was Michel le Basque, whose adventures form the subject of many a song and story.

To give a little idea of the extent to which these sea marauders carried their enterprises, it is sufficient to say that, in the year 1690, over forty laden merchant ships were captured and brought in to St. Jean de Luz. In 1692, 125 ships were captured, and de Grammont, writing to Louis XIV, says that the harbour was so full of prizes "that one may walk from the house where your Majesty lodged across to Ciboure on the decks of captured ships."

These were the golden days of St. Jean de Luz. The names of captured vessels—Dutch, Spanish, English and Portuguese—show that no country was immune. The cargoes were sold for enormous sums. In 1691 the *St. François*, under Captain Duconte, in one voyage captured eleven vessels which represented a sum of 113,000 pounds. Louis XIV sent for the bold Basque buccaneer, who was presented at the court of Versailles. Jean de Sopite was another great sea-captain. His ship, the *Basquaise*, braved

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the English squadrons which blockaded the French ports, ran the gauntlet and sailed the high seas, where it captured a West India merchantman laden with silks, spices and treasure.

Down to the beginning of the nineteenth century the corsairs of St. Jean continued their bold game, and we see the names of American vessels added to the long list of their prey: the *Spanish Lady*, an American brig laden with flour bound for Jersey, the *Polly*, carrying cocoa, wax and clocks, the *Conception*, laden with sugar, rice, cotton, coffee and hides. When we read the details of the cargoes on these captured vessels, we realise the actual wealth that poured in through these illicit methods to the town. We understand full well the history of those solid houses, built by these redoubtable kings of the sea. We imagine the treasures they contained, the rich Eastern stuffs, the spoils from many a home-bound bark, which went to beautify these nests of the French corsairs. St. Jean de Luz got the bulk of the riches, but Ciboure had its share. A rivalry for long existed between these sister towns. On the island between the bridges leading from St. Jean to Ciboure stands the ancient Convent of the Récollets, which was built in 1612, and dedicated to Notre Dame de la Paix in the hope of establishing peace between the two shores. The old well within the courtyard was given by Mazarin in 1659.

To this day the men of Ciboure make the best sailors in the French Navy. There are families living



## The Basque Country

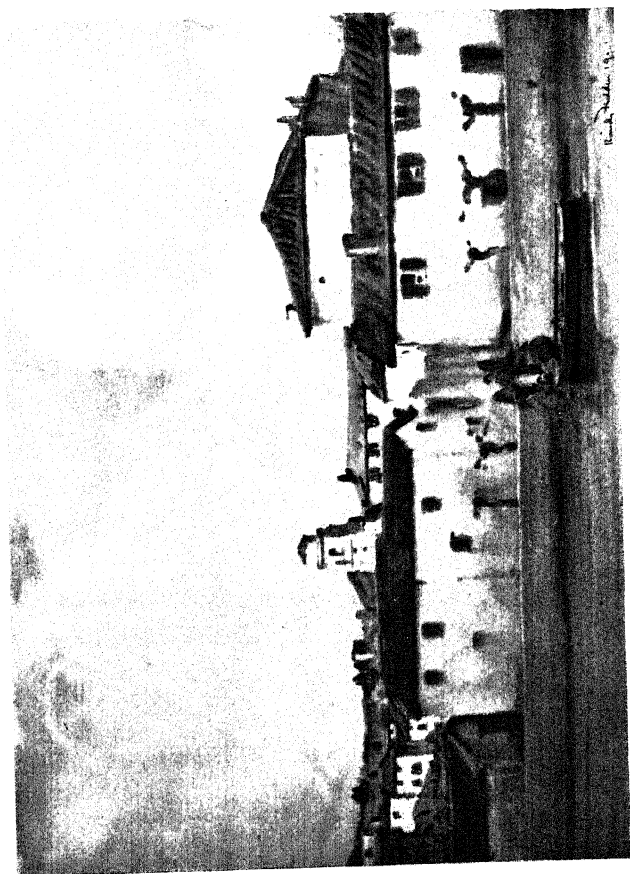
in those little streets whose men have for generations, for centuries, served the ships. There are several families there, too, whose men are famed as life-savers. Ciboure has a charm all its own. It is more quiet than St. Jean de Luz, and life there has all the intimacy of a village. From Ciboure you should take the walk that leads you along the quay, up the hill above the golden sandy cove, with its view of the whole horseshoe beach of St. Jean beyond, around the rocky point where the tamarisks wave, along the stretch beyond, in sight of the point of Socoa. Turn to your left up the hill, however, and climb to the votive chapel of Notre Dame de la Mer.

This year of 1919 finds the whitewashed walls on either side of the little shrine scribbled in pencil with passionate prayers—"Sauvez la France! Sauvez mon père! Sauvez la garde! Sauvez mon fiancé!" written in the anguished hours of the past four years.

From this height at sunset there is a view transcendent in its beauty. The sunset light bathes the range of mountains, the Trois Couronnes is transfigured, and La Rhune, the presiding genius of all this region, looms gloriously, while as far as your eye may follow up the broad valley of the Nivelle, mountain after mountain marches away in dim purple splendour. On the other side stretches the calm bay with a destroyer at anchor where once the no less valiant buccaneer was wont to lie, awaiting the moment to dash forth and dare the English squadron.



CONVENT DES RÉCOLLETS, ST. JEAN DE LUZ.





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Another delightful walk takes you out of Ciboure along the valley on the road to Urrugne, past the Château d'Urturbie on your right. This was the cradle of a warlike race, though the present building, restored in the eighteenth century, has remaining of the original pile only the dungeon and an ivy-covered bit of wall to the north.

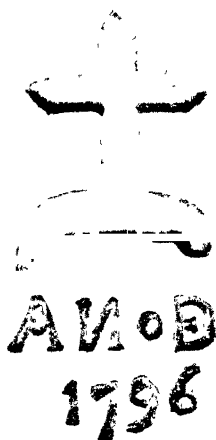
The family which takes its name from the Château shares in the annals of Labourd the title to age and importance with that of St. Pée. From the eleventh century the name appears in all records of the time. Under the English suzerains they were made guardians of Guipuzcoa, and had a castle on the Bidassoa of which no vestige now exists. In 1514 Louis d'Algate d'Urturbie was *échanson* to Louis XII and *bailli* of Labourd. Sons of the family held positions of trust under Louis XIII, Francis I and Henri II, fought against Spain, died before La Rochelle, and grew in importance under Louis XIV and XV. To-day, failing a direct heir, the property has gone out of the family. Yet it preserves an interest to us, standing as it does on the high-road travelled by kings and princes, and being, as it often was, the scene of historic meetings.

Beyond the Château you cross the little river Helbairén and climb the hill to Urrugne. Its fifteenth-century church is large and gloomy, and the houses lack the brightness and the whole place lacks the clean charm of most of the Basque villages. The motto on the church clock is as sombre as the town

## The Basque Country

itself : *Vulnerant omnes, ultima necat*, "All strike, the last kills."

On a hill north of the village stands the pilgrimage chapel of Notre Dame de Sogorry. It is worth the climb for the wonderful view of the mountains from La Haya and Juisquibel on the right, the Trois Couronnes before you, around to La Rhune which dominates the country as usual. Wherever you go in this part of the Basque country, La Rhune is above you : you feel it the titular deity of the region, and do not wonder at the legends which made it the abode of witches and evil spirits. There are days when the air is so very clear that you can see every stone and grotto, and an uncanny feeling grips you that it may be the home of unknown, unsuspected forces. Perhaps it is !



## CHAPTER VIII

*ST. PÉE, SARE, AINHOA, ASCAIN*

**A**N interesting round from St. Jean de Luz, by diligence or motor, is to St. Pée, Sare and Ainhoa, returning by Sare and Ascaïn.

The road from St. Jean follows the bank of the Nivelle, which runs smooth-flowing, wide and swift between field and meadow to the bridge near Ascaïn, where we stop to let down passengers. Here the road to St. Pée turns to the left and you get a view of the white houses of Ascaïn up the slopes of La Rhune, while a tumbling mountain stream rushes under a hump-backed stone bridge near us. The road runs on through quiet valley country to St. Pée upon the flat. St. Pée has little remaining in its quiet street to hint of the great days past. Of the Château only an angle of the donjon and a mound of grassy earth remain. Yet that square tower marked the stronghold of an ancient race of barons whose name appears as early as 1007. One Brunet de St. Pée was Governor of Bayonne in 1296. The Château was built by Jean de St. Pée or Sempé in 1403. In 1450 the male line ended, and the barony passed in the female line to the Baron d'Arhousse, Seigneur



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de St. Pée et d'Etchecou, who was one of the two hundred gentlemen-in-waiting to Francis I and *bailli* for Labourd from 1517 to 1532. Later the family gave a Chevalier of the Order of St. Michael to the court of Charles IX and a succession of *baillis* for Labourd down to 1659, as well as dignitaries to the state and brave officers to the army down to the present day. Yet actually there is nothing to hold your interest in St. Pée, and you will continue your way by the river bank, passing through the hamlet of Amots and along the valley till you see before you on a hill the beautiful village of Sare.

If you are a fisherman you cannot do better than enlist the interest of the husband of Madame at the hotel. He is one of those ne'er-do-wells who know every winding of the stream, every corner of the country. Fish you may not get, since the poachers everywhere exhibit an industry worthy of a better cause, but he will prove an entertaining guide, full of impossible tales of impossible feats.

Madame will perhaps find you rooms for the night with a friend in the little street downhill, across the small square. If so you will meet the friendly dog and the roguish little daughter, and perhaps be allowed to sit downstairs with them by the wood fire to warm yourself before you go to bed in the clean room above. From the stairs as you go up, you can look into the stable where the cows and the donkey and the cream-coloured oxen stand knee-deep in dried bracken, stamping and breathing hard in the warm darkness.

## St. Pée, Sare, Ainhoa, Ascain

The woman holds a candle over your shoulder that you may the better see. The farm animals always live on the ground floor of a Basque house. They are the friends of the family. You peer into the dark corner, "A mule?" you ask, knowing how much these are valued. The woman withdraws the candle. "We are not rich," she explains, "we are poor folk. Does Madame know the Basque proverb?"

When one is Basque and a good Christian,  
When one has two mules,  
He needs no more."

She bows smiling as she leaves us at our door. "Some-day we shall have two mules, Madame."

In the morning La Rhune looks in at your window, above the opposite roof, and you hurry to dress and to get out into the crystal air. Breakfast is ready for you in the café—bowls of café au lait and bread and butter. Monsieur is busy with fishing tackle on the terrace outside. Part of the square is filled with the grass-grown *pelote* court, which you already recognise as a central factor of life in these Basque villages. Opposite to the *pelote* court is the square-towered church on the side hill, with the mountain behind. Suddenly while we are breakfasting the church bell begins to toll, there is the drone of distant chanting, and across the window moves a curious mediæval procession, headed by a man in a short cloak, bare-headed, bearing a cross, followed in Indian file by more men in capes, then by the women mourners

## The Basque Country

in voluminous cloaks, the hood drawn over the head, with a heavy fall of lace hiding the face—these cloaks are handed down from generation to generation—and finally by all the women friends and neighbours in the black mantles always worn by Basque women to mass.

The long, slow-moving line of black crosses the square and is lost in the porch of the church.

After the burial the man who had led the funeral procession was the first to return to the house, where he stopped at the doorstep, crossed himself and said a prayer before entering to see that all was ready for the funeral feast. He was “the neighbour” (*Chen-bango*) who plays so great a part in the life of the Basque family. He is nearer than any blood relation. His are all the most solemn duties of friendship. It is he who lifts the tile from the roof of the house that the soul may take its flight. It is he who while the bell of the village church tolls its solemn message, bending above the body of the dead, slowly drops from the lighted candle, blessed by the priest, seven drops of wax in the form of a cross upon the cold breast from which all life has fled. It is he who, when the mortal remains cross for the last time the doorsill of the poor habitation, lights a handful of straw that the blue smoke ascending may symbolise the soul set free, while the white ash that remains is the poor body left. It is he who acts as master of ceremonies at the funeral feast, who makes the collection for masses for the dead; and finally it is to him,

## St. Pée, Sare, Ainhua, Ascain

when the guests have left, that the widow turns for help and advice.

Eight days after the funeral, there is a second mass at which friends and relations attend and a second "wake." And during the year that follows it is the custom for some member of the family to make a daily pilgrimage to the church, where a mass is said for the deceased.

Sare stands on a hill, and the white roads that lead up to it are bordered by plane trees which give grateful shade in the heat of summer. Monsieur, carrying the lunch and fishing-rods, will marshal you in the tiny square, where the few loungers under the arcades will assist with interest at your start. Not one can tell you the meaning of the tablets in the wall of the house above the café.

SARARI BALHOREAREN ETA LEYAL TASSUNAREN

SARIA EMANA LUIS XIV

1623.

So runs one, which means : "A recompense given to Sare for fidelity and courage by Louis XIV, 1623," when the town took a brave part in the war against Spain.

The other tablet bears this inscription :—

ANTONIO ABBADIARI

ESKUOL HERRIAREN

ORHORT ZAPENA

AGARRIHAREN 19. 1897.

## The Basque Country

“To Antoine d’Abbadie, from the Basque Country. In remembrance August 19, 1897.” To Antoine Abbadie, a wise scholar and good man, who gave a great part of his life to his own people, who loved them, who encouraged them in the preservation of their old customs and dress and language, and whom they greatly loved and honoured.

Once out of Sare, the wily Monsieur leading the way, you may follow up the valley of the Lourgorrieta by an ancient raised stone pavement, which leads you dryshod through muddy lanes. You will wonder at the care that went to the laying of such a way, and, of course, Monsieur can answer none of your questions. Great oaks border the pavement, and you will find your own reply awaiting you when the stone way turns from the stream up a hill and you see above you the two square, Moorish-looking towers of an ancient house. Monsieur may point sternly streamward, but you will climb up and you will come to a stone-arched gateway leading to a miry courtyard. Carved above the entrance is an escutcheon and the words :

PIERRE HIRREBARREN ET MARIE DE SANDOURE  
SIEUR ET DAME DE HARANBOURE, 1685.

It may be that this is the first of these inscriptions that you have met with, and you get out your note book and scribble it down, before you cross the courtyard to the ruined house. The house of Haranboure has fallen on evil days, and, knowing the Basque

## St. Pée, Sare, Ainhoa, Ascain

reverence for the home, your imagination is in full cry after the hidden tragedy, the fate which doomed this place. The poor woman who comes out to meet you speaks a Spanish-Basque which is unintelligible, but she sees your interest and she leads you to the stables, to show you the holy-water stoup which alone tells you that it was once a chapel. Did Marie de Sandoure love the place? Great oaks and beeches shade the house, and your eye plunges down through noble trees to where the stepping-stones span the stream in the valley below. Behind you, the hill rises to a shoulder of the mountain and the peak of La Rhune towers to the blue sky above. Marie de Sandoure—dead these centuries gone—did he woo you with the very songs that the shepherd on the heights above sings to Marie to-day?

Ma mie a la chevelure blonde, et de bonnes couleurs—la peau des mains blanche comme de l'argent fin. Elle-même est pleine de charmes plus qu'aucune autre.

“J'ai une maison, moi, qui est l'égal d'un château; vous y demeurerez assise sur un siège d'argent. . . .”

Monsieur is halloing from the bridge. He has caught a gudgeon. He is delighted. It is just four inches long.

. . . . .

From Sare to Ainhoa is seven kilometres, almost all the way uphill. But it is worth any effort you make to get there. It is such a clean, bright village,

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and the houses of the one street have such wonderful freshly whitewashed walls, such gaily painted balconies and shutters, blue, yellow, green, red. The church and the *pelote* court, the two centres of Basque life, are comfortably back to back, the pink walls of the court finding a fine background in the grey church wall. Two small boys are playing. At any moment of the day in any Basque village some one is throwing a ball at a wall.

Stone steps lead from the *pelote* court into the graveyard, where roses and iris grow thick amid the stones and a *maréchal niel* rose hangs its heavy yellow heads of bloom against an ancient tomb.

At Ainhoa in 1919 sugar could be bought! The price, to be sure, was eight francs the kilo, but this was not to be haggled over, considering the sugar famine we had endured and the hazardous way by which the sugar came. It was contraband, so too was the Spanish tobacco which might be had for much money and small questioning. Ainhoa is on the frontier, and all the tales of Basque smugglers that you have read from *Ramuntcho* down, recur to you when you come face to face with the jaunty Spanish guards who bar the road a few yards out of the village. The Basques have the courage, coolness and agility which are necessary to the successful smuggler. In their code, which is upheld by the Church, smuggling is no sin against religion or morals. The only sin would lie in bribing a frontier guard, not in successfully bringing over the frontier without





CHURCH WITH PELOTE COURT, AINHOA.





## St. Pée, Sare, Ainhua, Ascaïn

duty coffee or wine, tobacco or sugar, paid for in Spain and to be sold in France. If this is true in times of peace, how much more so when war has deprived the people of these necessities of life. You must remember, too, that it is Basque against Basque, not French against Spanish in these mountains. Nowhere more than here does the tie of race hold good. The Basques on the two sides of that imaginary frontier line have the same traditions, customs, language and interests. This explains the facility with which smuggling is carried on over the mountain passes or across the Bidassoa under cover of the darkness. A band of smugglers numbers ten to twelve young men, picked for endurance, fleetness and courage, who follow a chosen guide, single file, with cask or bale on shoulder, for miles over the mountain paths. If, as sometimes happens, the *douaniers* have been warned and the smugglers are surprised, at the first shot the line melts into the forest to meet at some given rendezvous. The Basque smuggler is a peaceful creature; he never attacks a *douanier*, but once attacked gives fight to the death, and it is seldom that he gets the worst of it. In all the little villages of the frontier, smuggling is part of the life and is taken as a matter of course, and many is the story told on winter evenings of the prowess of such well-known smugglers as Gambocha, Hermoso, Joaquin and Arkaitza.

As you stroll back from your meeting with the Spanish frontier guards, up the wide street, you will

## The Basque Country

not fail to notice on a fine house to your left a most interesting inscription which reads :

CESTE MAISON APELÉE GORRITIA AESTE  
RACHETÉE PAR MARIE DÈ GORRITI MÈRE D FEV JEAN  
DOLHAGARAY DES SOMMES PAR LUI ENVOYÉS DES  
INDES. LAUELLE MAISON NE SE POURRA VANDRE  
NE ENGAIGER. FAIT EN L'AN 1662.

This house called Gorritia was bought by Marie de Gorriti, mother of the late Jean Dolhagaray, with money sent by him from the Indies. This house cannot be sold or mortgaged. Built in the year 1662.

Over a barn door as you drive out of the village is a long lintel stone on which you will see not only the cross and the sign of Mary, but the Alpha and Omega and the seventeenth-century date. There is also a beautiful old Basque house on the green facing the *pelote* court—delightful in its creamy walls and pale grey shutters and spacious air.

From Sare you should walk back over the height of Uhartia to Ascain. At any hour the wild way and the wide view will delight you, but if it is late afternoon with a descending sun over the sea before you, so much the better. Ascain lies on a slope of the hill and, if sophisticated, is a delightful type of Basque village. At the long, clean, white Hôtel de la Rhune, with its trailing wistaria, you may get real tea *à l'anglais* served at a little table on the gravelled terrace under interlaced plane trees. Palms and bamboo and roses give it an exotic touch on a warm spring day which is quite enchanting. The *pelote*



CHURCH AT ASCAIN.







## St. Pée, Sare, Ainhua, Ascain

court, as usual, holds one end of the little *place*, while the square, squat-towered church, quite orange in the light of the declining sun, presides above. Of all roomy church porches this is the deepest and would hold a whole congregation safely sheltered on a rainy day. Ascain was the manor of one Robert de Sossionde, Bishop of Bayonne in the sixteenth century, and a more pleasant place of retreat cannot be imagined. But what a brave ecclesiastic he, to face the evil influences of the mountain! For on the slope of La Rhune dwelt the devil—Deburia—and there all the witches and lesser devils met to conduct their horrid rites. It was they who caused the thunderstorms, the blight upon the harvest, the murrain on the cattle. Perhaps our bishop built the very chapel on La Rhune where prayers were to be said to combat the evil influences, that chapel which was believed in the sixteenth century to be accursed and the nocturnal rendezvous of all the demons. In 1609 a royal commission was sent down from Paris to investigate the rumours which had reached even the ears of the King. Principally on the evidence of a girl of thirteen, who confessed herself to be a witch, over five hundred people were brought before the tribunal on the charge of sorcery, and hundreds were condemned to death by fire or sword.

What did the bishop think of it, we wonder. It may be that he turned his eyes, not to the mountain, but to the sunset.

## CHAPTER IX

### *HENDAYE, FONTARABIA AND THE ILE DES FAISANS*

**I**T will be impossible for you to leave St. Jean de Luz without wishing to follow the way of those many royal progresses from the Spanish frontier into France by Fontarabia, the Ile des Faisans and Hendaye. This is quite easy to accomplish, since the banks of the Bidassoa are but eight miles distant, and a day will give you all the time you need.

Hendaye is a little French town which rejoices in a Spanish view: Hendaye will live in your memory as a view. Beyond the grey sluggish Bidassoa rise the rich umber roofs and pale walls of Fontarabia, against the bare brown mountains which sweep from the Cap de Figuiet at the sea eastwards around the plain where stands Irun on its height, shining in the sun. Faizquitel is the mountain behind the town, with its pilgrimage chapel of Our Lady of Guadeloupe, whose feast-day—celebrated on the 8th September—commemorates a great victory when Cabrera, Admiral of Castille, fell upon the French forces and drove them up the mountain side.

From Hendaye you will take a boat from the water

## Fontarabia and the Ile des Faisans

gate across to Fontarabia. You land at the little jetty where picturesque fishermen lounge by their boats along the shore. These are the fishermen who belong to that guild which from the Middle Ages down to this day have elected the Alcalde, their "Mayor of the Sea," in the month of July. The election is performed with certain classic rites amidst the bygone splendours of the old town hall. It is something to see if you are lucky enough to be there at that season. A blaze of colour in the old streets, the red and yellow flag of Spain, the red banner of the Guild with its blue escutcheon; musicians in quaint red caps; a young and noble-stepping woman in white bearing on her head a coffer containing the papers of the Order; music, and the procession takes its way to the cottage of the fisherman-mayor where a feast is spread.

You will enter this old town of Fontarabia by the great gateway—Puerta de Santa Maria—bearing the arms of the town. The main street, *des Cavaliers*, rises steeply—a Spanish street of the Middle Ages—narrow, with houses of projecting eaves, finely wrought iron balconies, heavily carved emblazonries above the arched doorways, to end in the steep massive walls of the Church of Our Lady of the Ascension. A wonderful church this, built in the eleventh century, but the interior, thoroughly Spanish with its vulgar coloured altars and gilded saints, is a disappointment. In the delightful old porch of the church which leads into the green shade of plane trees, you will find the

## The Basque Country

following amusing warning painted upon the wall :

Se prohíbe jugar à la pelota en este atrio. Bajo la multa de 2 pesetas.

It is to be imagined that there are Basques so keen as willingly to pay two pesetas for the pleasure of playing handball against that enticing wall.

Under the plane trees you may walk into the large, deserted-looking square, Plaza de Armas, grass growing between its stones, where the old Castle of Jeanne la Folle raises its massive façade, dating from the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. Entering the great door you will make your way into a ruined, grass-grown, roofless room, and mount from there the wide stair to the terrace above with its extended view of Hendaye, the Bidassoa, the ocean and the surrounding mountains. This part of the building, bare, empty and imposing, is much older than that facing the square, and was built at the beginning of the tenth century by Sanche le Fort, King of Navarre.

Returning by the main street to the town gate, you will find yourself under the plane trees of the promenade along the ancient ramparts; and keeping to the right in a sweep around under the bull-ring, you will find the tram for Irun. It is quite worth taking, because in these days it is an adventure to jingle along in a tram drawn by mules and to receive a little paper picture ticket for your pennies. The road winds through the marshes which border the river, and then up an incline into the town.



A SPANISH BASQUE INN.







## Fontarabia and the Ile des Faisans

Irun is *en fête*—why, we do not understand, but that it is a Basque festival we know, for we see here for the first time the flag of the Basque country unfurled, and realise that we are in the province of Guipuzcoa. The banner flaunts the magic *Zaspiak Bat*, and the shield of the Basque country which bears the quarterings of the seven sister provinces. The story of these quarterings is full of romance. First come the chains of Navarre and Basse-Navarre. In the year 1212 Sanche le Fort, King of Navarre, went on a crusade with all the princes of Spain and many other Christian knights against Mahomod, grand Miramomelin of Africa. The Christian army numbered 100,000 men on foot and 16,000 horsemen. Mahomod marshalled a force of 300,000 men, besides 28,000 Moors on horseback to guard his chariot which was in the shape of a throne. This magnificent throne was covered by a pavilion of scarlet silk sewn with flowers and birds in rich embroidery, and was surrounded by a palisade and a barrier of iron chains. In the centre of this great host, within this moving fort, the Moorish King advanced, as he believed, in safety. The King of Navarre made a great attack, cut his way through the host, slew 20,000 Moors, broke down the palisade and made himself master of the throne. The chains in the form of a trellis he adopted as his emblem.

The story of the three quarterings in the arms of Guipuzcoa, which have second place on the shield, is as follows : (1) The King of Navarre was a prisoner

## The Basque Country

of the King of Aragon. His soldiers delivered him, and the people placed his image on their banner to remind their King of what he owed to them. (2) The twelve cannon were taken from the French on December 12, 1512, by the Spaniards under Jeanne la Folle, at the battle of Bêlate. (3) The trees represent the province of Guipuzcoa bathed by the waves of the sea.

Biscaye carries an oak, because the great assembly, the *bilzaar*, met beneath the tree of Guernica in this province, and bears, as well, the wolves, the arms of de Haro, Seigneur of Biscaye.

In the arms of Alava we see the mailed fist of Castille faced with defiance by the lions—the people of the province. It recalls the fact that when the Confradia of Arriaja who possessed the land recognised the King of Castille in the fourteenth century, it was only on condition that he maintained their laws. The lion is strong and ready to resist.

The lion in the arms of Labourd was borne on the shields of most of the great families of the province, du Sault d'Hasparren, de Grammont, d'Armagnac, etc. The fleur-de-lis was granted as a royal concession by Charles VII in 1451, to commemorate the annexation of Labourd to France.

The lion rampant, the arms of the Vicomté of Mauléon, was adopted as the arms of the town of Mauléon and of the province of La Soule.

Between Irun and Hendaye is a little hamlet on the two sides of the river called Behobia in Spain and

## Fontarabia and the Ile des Faisans

Behobé in France. Here to-day is the international bridge between Spain and France, built in 1878. But you will not cross by the bridge; you will take a boat from the Spanish shore to the Ile des Faisans, for the sake of the historic associations.

There is little to-day to tell of the glories past. The island is low, kept from complete dissolution by piles and stone walls. A modest monument in the middle of a small garden bears an inscription: "In memory of the Conférences of 1659, during which Louis XIV and Philip IV by a happy alliance put an end to the long state of war between their two nations. Napoleon III, Emperor of the French, and Isabel, Queen of Spain, restored this island in 1861."

Surely this small space of earth, this tiny island in the slow-moving river, is historic ground if ever such there were; and standing there you will remember the momentous decisions which have here been made, and will recall the gorgeous pageantry for which this has been the theatre. How much the eye counted in those far-past days! What thought, what care for detail, what elaborateness of preparation, what prodigality of spending went to the setting of every royal meeting here.

If Louis XI chose to wear a frieze coat, its pockets were lined with gold pieces to bribe the Spanish courtiers of the King of Castille, and the frieze, you may be sure, was as nicely calculated to impress as was the magnificence of many another King. Francis I, with his pointed beard and hawk-like eye and nose

## The Basque Country

passed this way, as we know, leaving here those two little sons as hostages for the faith he never meant to keep. Anne of Austria, Isabella of Valois, Eleanor of Austria, Maria Theresa—how many of them have stood upon this ground, with what mounting hopes, what satisfied ambition, what breaking hearts !

The height of splendour seems to have been reached when one Don Velasquez came from Madrid as quarter-master-general of King Philip's household to lavish his incomparable knowledge of form and colour upon the arrangements for the reception of King Louis XIV and his mother Anne of Austria, of Maria Theresa and her father, Philip IV. The great painter raised here a fairy pavilion, gorgeous with gilding, sumptuous with priceless tapestries—beautiful, we may be sure, when it was thronged with the splendid figures of the chief actors, amongst whom Velasquez himself was distinguished.

When you have read the descriptions of these great occasions, the pomp, the splendour of equipment, the gorgeous ensemble, you feel that these are indeed but grey days in which we live, when royalty walks amongst us stripped of its great prerogative of illusion. The days of black velvet lined with crimson satin, banded with cloth of gold and embroidered with precious stones, are past ; so too the plumed hat with its jewelled aigrette and the satin doublet and the silken hose. It is only on the Ile des Faisans that you are removed for a moment from reality and may see it all again.

## CHAPTER X

### *A LITTLE JOURNEY INTO BEARN: ORTHEZ—PAU*

Qui n'a vist lo Casteig de Paü  
Jamoy n'a vist arey de taü.

SO in the sixteenth century the Béarnais sang in their pride and so the lovers of Pau would echo to-day. Approaching from Bayonne, however, you will choose to stop at Orthez for the day, going on to Pau by the afternoon train, for Orthez was before Pau the capital of Béarn, and has moreover much of the charm remaining from the days when it had a place in the pages of Froissart. The old chronicler tells us that he slept at the inn, La Lune, kept by Ernauton Espasgne du Lyon, a squire of Gaston IX, Count of Béarn and Foix. As you approach the town on its hill, by the wonderful old fourteenth-century bridge with the tower in the centre, you cannot imagine it as it was in that day when the now crumbling Tour de Moncade rose above a stately castle built by Gaston VI (1232-1290), where Gaston IX held a brilliant court. As we learn from Froissart, we should have met visitors from every part of the world, hastening here, sure of a generous welcome. "It

## The Basque Country

was here," he says, "I was informed of the greater part of the events which had happened in Spain, Portugal, Navarre, England and Scotland; for I saw during my residence knights and squires from these nations."

Within the vestiges of the walls that once echoed to open-handed hospitality surely you will see, at any midnight hour, the ghost of that old Count enter once again with the flickering lights of his twelve torch-bearers leading the way to the phantom board where knights and squires await him.

Orthez breathes of the Middle Ages as Pau of a more modern day, and you even grudge the story of a later date which has given its name to the old bridge—*frimestro dous caperas*—the window of the priests, in memory of a dark deed of the Calvinists under Montgomery in 1659, who cast the priests from this bridge into the river below.

From Orthez to Pau the country grows more lovely with every mile, and every little town you see holds a legacy of interest. Castelis on the hill bears still its name of Roman derivation, above the site of a Roman fort where the peasants' plough turns Roman shards to light. Along the plain are Argagnon, Gouze, Lendresse, Arance, and off to the right on a steep eminence the larger town of Lagor. To the left again is Lacq, which had its beginning in the tenth century.

Always you are following the Gave de Pau, and you recognise with a warming of the heart the picture

## A Little Journey into Béarn

which hung—in pale water-colour—in a wide white mount and narrow tarnished gold frame upon the old drawing-room wall. Here are the pale blue shallow river, the golden sand-banks, the fragile poplars, the soft green hills and the snow-capped mountains; here running along beside us is the very posting-road they followed, Uncle John and Aunt Maria, on their somewhat self-conscious *tour* with their embossed leather boxes up behind.

The approach to Pau is a wonderful moment, to be remembered. The town rises like a series of white cliffs from a wide green sea, and after you have climbed the winding road, surely there are few places in the world with such a view as greets you from the wide, balustraded terrace. It is a marvel which defies description. Beyond the valley of the Gave, beyond the hills, is the great panorama—no other word really expresses it—of the mountains, from the Pic du Midi de Bigorre to the east, by the Mont Aigu, le Néouville, le Pic Long, l'Ardiden, le Mont Perdu, le Marboré, la Vignemale, le Pic de Gabizos, le Pic Bonbat, le Pic de Ger, le Pic de Cezny. Your eyes reach le Pic du Midi d'Ossau, opposite Pau, then le Pic d'Aule, le Pic Buro, and finally, rising from the valley of the Aspe, le Pic d'Anie, the last mountain to the left. To live in Pau is to have that glory always before you in every imaginable atmospheric effect. You share the longing to carry some hint of that glory with you which is the excuse for that pale water-colour on the drawing-room wall.



## The Basque Country

It seems when you first see that view that you must live on the terrace, but Pau has so much of interest, offers you so much of pleasure, that the view, so human are we, becomes in time the background to existence. For the cosmopolitan society who winter in Pau—French, English and American chiefly—there are many places of reunion and many amusements and some good sport. Fox-hunting was started in 1842, and there are three meets a week in the season. There are racing, polo, pigeon-shooting, tennis, golf, and, above all, there is the English Club, which is the fountain-head of all these activities.

The town is for the townfolk, but Pau for the cosmopolitan exists only in the great hotels and in the hundreds of white villas, set in almost tropical gardens, which border the neat boulevards and roads for several miles into the country.

But in addition to the superficial charm of the life, Pau has romance in the very air, for wherever the figure of Henri IV appears, there history becomes vivid, as if we could still feel the charm of his presence. Henri IV presides over the Place Royale, where he enjoys, we feel, the company of the well-dressed men and beautiful women who listen to the music beneath the trees. Henri IV was born in the Château of Pau. As the French picture-book *Le Bon Roi Henri* has it, *sa mère le mit au monde en chantant*, and it gives you a lovely picture of the canopied bed and the old grandfather, Henri II, carrying the little naked baby off in the tail of his robe to give him a drop of *vin*



VIEW FROM THE TERRACE AT PAU.





## A Little Journey into Béarn

*de Jurançon.* You may stand in that room and look upon the royal cradle; but I am not sure that Henri IV has not rivals in your interest at the Château. The House of Navarre has the quality which fixes attention and commands sympathy. We find that Gaston Phœbus married in 1349 Agnès de Navarre, and thereafter often left the great castle at Orthez for Pau, whither Froissart followed him and found this *un moult bel chastel*. In 1416 one Jean de Béarn, who had fought for the French King, stood by the side of Jeanne d'Arc at the coronation of Charles VII at Rheims. It is to his son, Gaston X, that Pau owes much, for he made the Château his home, and built the north and east portions and enclosed the park. But it is the following generations who live for us: Catherine of Navarre and her weak husband Jean d'Albret; Henri II of Navarre who became by treaty the ally of Francis I of France, the two kings swearing mutually "to be the friend of your friends and the enemy of your enemies." When Charles V demanded passage through Navarre, Henri II proudly refused consent, and as a reward received from Francis I the hand of his sister, that remarkable princess, Marguerite de Valois, whom the poets named Marguerite des Marguerites, pearl of pearls, pearl of the Valois. It is their cipher that we see entwined in the arabesques of the great Renaissance staircase: H.R. M.R., Henri Roi, Marguerite Reine. Surrounded here by a crowd of artists, architects, sculptors and designers, the young Queen of Navarre undertook the embellish-

## The Basque Country

ment of the Château, which changed under her transforming guidance from a severe Gothic manor to the magnificent Renaissance palace which we see to-day. To her sense of beauty we owe the court and the exquisite proportion and decoration of the series of apartments on the west. Not content with building, Marguerite surrounded the Château with the most beautiful gardens which were then to be found in Europe.

Here for many years Marguerite held her miniature court. It became known as one of the intellectual centres of Europe. She was the friend of the Reformation in France and, herself a writer, was a great patroness of literature. She was a flower of the Renaissance and the Château is her monument.

The daughter of Marguerite and Henri, Jeanne d'Albret, a woman of great goodness and sense, was the mother of Henri IV. She it is whose name will ever be associated with the cause of the Protestants in France. She was the leader of the Protestant cause for many years, though the unprejudiced reader of history must realise that, while the principles involved may have been the highest, the methods employed for their advancement differed nothing from those used by the Catholic party. So it is that the Château of Pau was the scene of treachery. After Montgomery in the name of the Protestant cause had massacred 3,000 Catholics at Orthez, Ferride, the head of the Catholic forces, surrendered with his ten officers. They were taken to Pau, where

## A Little Journey into Béarn

they were bidden to a feast in the Château at which they were all slain.

Henri IV, we must remember, was sent to nurse at Billère, a village not two miles from the Château, where he ran wild with the young peasants of his age. He married another Marguerite de Valois, daughter of Catherine de Medici, who certainly did not share the virtues of his grandmother. This brilliant and beautiful and dashing Princess brought gaiety to the Château of Pau, where as usual she engaged in those intrigues which have made her name notorious. She soon found the little Huguenot town too dull for her and left *le petit Genève de Pau*. Her successor as châtelaine was Catherine, sister of Henri IV, beloved by the people, a wise and charming woman of studious tastes, who attracted many well-known men of the day to her court. When she was to leave for Paris to be married, a crowd besieged the Château imploring her not to desert them. She promised them that she would return, but she never saw Pau again, and with her departure the decadence of the Château began.



## CHAPTER XI

### *A LITTLE JOURNEY INTO BÉARN: OLORON—SAUVETERRE*

WHY we may legitimately make this journey into Béarn from the Basque country needs perhaps a word of explanation. Navarre, a Basque province, became in the fifteenth century an appanage of the House of Béarn, whose princes took the title of King of Navarre, and from that time the written history of Béarn became the written history of the French Basque country. Béarn, like the Basque provinces, was free, maintaining its own *fors* with a like tenacity. Yet, though sharing so much of a common past, the Béarnais to-day dislike the Basques, while the Basques distrust the Béarnais. The Basques are immovably Catholic, the Béarnais are generally Protestant. But geographically and historically Béarn and the Basque country are one.

From Pau it is thirty-three kilometres to Oloron. The train passes through Jurançon with its vineyards, where the pleasant white wine is made, crosses the river Néez, then mounts steadily up through wild broken country, spanning ravines, till it reaches the high plateau of Belair. Here, on an evening in

## A Little Journey into Béarn

May, there was such an effect of colour as is very seldom seen. The setting sun, by some strange refraction of light, bathed hill and mountain in a quivering brilliant rosy purple. It was an intense colour and clear, as if one looked on the whole landscape through the fabled rose-coloured glasses. The quiet occupants of the railway carriage, including two ancient ladies in faded black and a young soldier home on leave, crowded to the window awed by the quite unearthly beauty of the scene. From that moment events ceased to be real. The journey from Buzy was simply slipping farther into an enchanted land, till it was no surprise to see Oloron rising like some phantom city on its hills, divided by deep rushing rivers, twinkling with lights against a primrose sky.

The guide-books tell you nothing of the place, dismiss it with a word, but surely it is very wonderful. On the walk up from the station the sense of strangeness grew with every step. There, amidst the continual rush of waters from deep ravines, high bridges finally led us to a quiet hostel in a mediæval street. Perhaps the full moon was responsible for the wizardry of the late walk. It laid a brilliant pathway up the steep hill between dark ancient houses, fast in stillness, and brought us face to face with a deep-porched doorway in the wall of the church of Ste. Croix. The moon shone full on a white wall at our right, just where the street on the hill-top was wide and the houses tall and filled with mystery. It was all silent, black and white and wonderful; it was all silent until

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there stole upon the air the sound of music which took us down hill on the opposite side, out into a little square where the lower windows of a building were lighted. The music went on—a flute and a guitar—a curious five-time dance tune, which drew us close, till we could see the figures within the lighted room. The elders sat about the wall clapping their hands in rhythmic time to the dance of the young men and maidens, a kind of mazurka. We stole away, and returning up the square once more into the shadow of the church with its curious square, ugly tower, found ourselves looking down over the roofs of houses to where the moon made pools of light in the smooth-flowing river. Turning from the way we had come up, we plunged down a lane, with high walls on the upper hillside, and below, through the trees of the gardens, we saw another swift-flowing river.

It was not till the morning light that we discovered how Oloron stands upon three hills at the junction of two rushing mountain streams, the Gave d'Aspé and the Gave d'Oloron: Oloron-Ste. Croix, the ancient town between the Aspé and Oloron, Oloron-Ste. Marie on the west bank of the Aspé, and the new town on the east bank of the Oloron.

May chance, that most alluring of guides, lead you from Oloron to Sauveterre. If you are a fisherman you will find trout to be caught on the way, at the village of Navarrenx. Sauveterre is another surprise, for you will have read but two lines in the

## A Little Journey into Béarn

guide-book and so be quite unprepared for the charm of the place—a quiet charm which may well lure you to spend a day or two at the tiny inn.

Sauveterre, une ville bonne à devise,  
A l'entrée d'Espagne assise,

as one Guillaume Suiart wrote in the thirteenth century, is on a height above the Gave d'Oloron, which here has broadened into an imposing stream. As it commands the entry to the valley, this town was often in early days the seat of political conferences between the French and English, and later between the French and Spanish. As you approach it over the modern bridge, the town stands above you nearly surrounded by its ancient walls, the great donjon of the castle still towering, as well as the ivy-grown ruin of part of the old turreted bridge. This bridge led, in past days, from the town gate in the ramparts to an island, and a second bridge connected the island with the farther shore; this gave a double opportunity for defence against an attacking enemy, as a stand could be made on the island and again at the shore.

The town was besieged in 1209 and taken by Alphonse de Castille. In 1276 Philippe le Hardi decided to press the claims of his nephew to the throne of Castille. One of his armies under the Count d'Artois marched on Navarre. Philippe, having received the oriflamme from the Abbaye of St. Denis, took the road with the Duc de Bourgogne, the

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Duc de Brabant, and a mighty host, and as the old chronicler says :

Passet per Gascoyna, per la terra en Gasto,  
Venue à Sauvaterra on l'endergnon el Gasco.

The army lacked food on their long march from Paris, but when they reached Sauveterre their joy was great. "They occupied the gardens, the fields, and the vineyards. There you saw encamped the barons, the foot-soldiers and the archers, and you saw many men in shining armour and many beautiful banners and many nobles, many fine shields and trappings, black and coloured. There were so many that a two-denier loaf sold at ten because of the need of every one."

The town was the scene of the meeting in 1462 between Louis XI and Jean d'Aragon, when a treaty of peace was signed. In 1523 it was besieged by Philibert de Châlons, Prince of Orange, when the town was so hard pressed that part of the old bridge was sacrificed, the tower of which still stands.

The church you will find to be a most interesting combination of Romanesque and Gothic. Before the present tower was built it had a crenellated wall around the roof for men-at-arms, and must have proved an effective fortress, as it stands on an open space close to the ancient walls. From the old parapet you get a magnificent view of the valley stretching away to Mauléon and of the mountains in the distance. The church was begun in the eleventh

## A Little Journey into Béarn

century, but was left unfinished, and legend has supplied the story of its final achievement in the thirteenth century.

Gaston V, Count of Béarn, so the story goes, part history and part legend, in order to counter the ambitious designs of Sanche V, King of Navarre, married Sanche's sister, Sancie. Gaston was killed some months after the marriage, leaving Sancie a widow expectant of motherhood. The peace and prosperity of the province depended upon this infant, who would unite the parties of Béarn and Navarre. Unfortunately the child was born dead, and the barons of Béarn, in their rage, accused Sancie of herself causing the mischance, and they called upon King Sanche, her brother, to be her judge. He came to Sauveterre for the trial of his sister in 1170, to find 3,000 men assembled who demanded that the Countess Sancie should be tried by the ordeal of fire or water, whichever she preferred. She chose the ordeal by water. The King and the barons then ordained that her feet and her hands should be tied and that she should be thrown from the old bridge into the river. The day came; the King, the barons, priests and people were assembled; the Countess was led through the curious crowd to the bridge, where she was bound hand and foot. The sentence was read by the Bishop, and then, amidst a breathless hush, she was cast over the parapet. As she fell she made a vow in her passionate innocence, "Ste. Marie, save me! and I will finish the church at Sauveterre." She struck

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the water in the deepest and swiftest part of the river; the current caught her, swung her round and landed her safe upon a bank of sand. Thus her innocence was proven and the church at Sauveterre was finished.

Above a door at one side of the church is a bit of ancient carving which is unique because the unlettered craftsman has placed the Omega before the Alpha. This was pointed out to us by the curé, who, himself a Béarnais, takes a great interest in the history of the town. Seated in the clean, bare parlour of the sacristy, he talked with enthusiasm of his loved province. To him the Basques as a people do not exist. He regards them as unlettered folk without history or literature. "You must read the history of Béarn to know the history of the Basques," he said. He exalted his church and told us the story of Sancier which we have written. As we went out he pointed to the staircase and would have us notice the stair-rail, which shone, a long, sinuous line of polished wood, ending at the newel in a realistic serpent's head.

The old servant, who had admitted us charily, stepped from the bright-tiled kitchen with a candle to let us out into the warm, dark night.

## CHAPTER XII

### *A MARKET DAY IN TARDETS*

OF the three Basque provinces in France, Basse-Navarre, Labourd and La Soule, the last is the one to which we must look as the stronghold of the ancient customs and traditions. When you say "La Soule," you mean the valley of the Saison (Uhaitz-Handia), the river which rises in the high wild region of Bassa-Buria, under the pass of Ste. Engrâce, rushes through the deep gorge of Cacouette, passes the village of Ste. Engrâce, which gives its name to the pass above, waters the narrow valley where lie the villages of Licq and Etchebar, Larrau and Lichans, and runs on to Tardets, the town on the first plain, then to Mauléon, the second town, and finally, as we have seen, passes beneath the walls of Sauveterre in Béarn, which guards the entrance to the valley.

If you take the steam train at Oloron for Tardets, you will find yourself started upon a most amusing journey, for you wander along with the utmost deliberation, making intimate acquaintance with barnyards and back-doors, meandering slowly across fields



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and through lanes, and threading village streets where you could shake hands with the smiling peasants in the cottage windows. As it is market day in Tardets there are crowds of peasants waiting at the stations, and you get delightful glimpses of life and manners as well as of the countryside itself. There is good excuse for the slowness of the train, for you are ascending the valley of the Barétous, and you continue to rise, past the villages of Aramits and Arette and Lanne, the first Basque village, till you reach the crest of the Col de Lapixe. From there you begin a slow and winding descent, enlivened by the information of a government traveller in wood, who is eager to point out every view, every peak and village. It was he who told us about the *chien de Montory*, and, as the train wound around the top of a hill, pointed out to us a farm far below and on the other side of the valley. Already peasants were hanging out of the carriage windows watching for one of the pleasures of the weekly journey to market. We were not to be disappointed, for suddenly out from the farm shot a tiny black moving speck which took a mad course towards us, upward and across the opposite side of the valley. Delighted yells of recognition encouraged the moving spot, which soon resolved itself into a small and excited black dog, which came tearing up the hill below us and finally ranged himself alongside the moving train for what was evidently a glorious gallop. Barking and frisking, and positively laughing with intelligence, he kept even with us, only pausing

## A Market Day in Tardets

to catch the offerings of sugar and biscuits which were thrown to him from the carriage windows. He accompanied the train across the valley, where it finally passed close to the door of the farm. There, with one laughing frisk, he left us, and the last we saw of him he stood before the farmhouse door, panting and wagging his tail, as he watched us out of sight.

From Montory, the railway follows the Gaslon down the valley to Tardets. However much you may grow in time to dislike the dust and dirt and noise of a market day, there are certain places where one should not miss the market, where the colour and movement add greatly to the picture. This is true of Tardets, where the market is held on a Monday. There the somewhat sad-looking triangular square surrounded by arcaded steep-roofed houses, grey and buff and mauve, was already filled with *baragues*, where the usual wares were on sale under cream-white or red awnings. Oranges and lemons from over the passes overflowed great baskets of Spanish weave. Dates, figs and raisins were heaped on large flat round woven trays. Set out upon a green canvas on the ground was the earthenware, pots and jugs and *écuelles* of yellow and brown. Here, too, on the cobbles stood a massed array of brass and copper—cowbells and sheepbells and kettles. Goats' milk cheeses and brown and cream-coloured eggs in large panniers waited for the wholesale produce dealer to come and buy them; red-faced, prosperous, oily

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young men with an urbane air, who arrive at all the markets in their small motor vans, joke with the women, lunch on the best at the inn, and then roll out of the square with waving hand to the prettiest girl.

To-day all the women were buying hats, large, flat-brimmed, conical-crowned shade-hats of fine black or white straw for wear under the hot sun of the high mountain sides. Many more were buying *espadrilles*, the rope-soled canvas shoe worn by the peasants everywhere in this country, and which are made with such skill by the village *cordonnier*. They are delightful footgear for these mountains, so light that you do not feel them, and yet strong and giving a secure hold on the hill-sides. The little square is crowded. Under the deep arcades, along two sides, the carts are ranged closely, wheel to wheel, while horses and mules stand and stamp, tied to cart-tails, or to rings in the walls under the arcades. Wedged into every corner are the little grey donkeys with their huge panniers—the long-suffering, hardworked, clever little beasts, despised by their masters, who have a contemptuous proverb which says “The ass carries the wine and drinks water.” But the little mouse-coloured beast of burden is none the less the peasant’s best friend. The poorest can afford one, while mules are for the prosperous, and horses a luxury for the rich. Seeing the work they have to do, you wonder if ever they get a rest. Are the donkeys given a half-holiday in honour of St. Blaise, or does the

## A Market Day in Tardets

Basque farmer, when he goes to the *pardon* of the patron saint of animals, take only a few hairs to burn from the tail of his more important farm friends—from his cows and his mules and his horses, considering the little ass not worth a mass at fifty centimes? You wonder. The crowd itself is quiet. There is less gaiety, fewer jests than in Brittany. There is no vendor of songs. Here are men of typical Basque physiognomy. The young men are handsome, brown-eyed, with hair of deepest brown, fine foreheads, long noses, neat, well-shaped heads set on broad, rather square shoulders, with well-rounded throats, compact body on slim muscular legs, small hands and feet—the whole giving an impression of balance and flexibility. The older men, brown-faced with thick grey or white hair, have a crafty look in their sharp, long-nosed faces. All are clean-shaven. It is a good-looking race, which breathes self-reliance, dignity and freedom. Every man in the market carries a staff, the *makila*, and many carry the double-ended sack, *bussac*, handwoven, generally of red and blue, which are heirlooms in the family. Most of them are dressed in short black jacket and velveteen trousers. All, without exception, wear clean white cotton shirts, open at the throat, and some have a scarlet sash folded tightly around their hips. A few wear a short linen blouse, falling from a yoke loose to the waist. The women, young and old, are dressed in neat black; the married women wear a black handkerchief folded about the coil of hair, with the addition

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of a gold chain and large brooch. The girls wear a lace mantilla.

Beyond the square by the street which is also crowded with carts and men drinking outside the wine-shops, you reach the cattle market. Pigs and cows and oxen fill the road which is already trampled to mire. Up the rocky hillside are the sheep and the long-haired mountain goats.

The Basque cows, like their masters, are small, quick and fine. They are full of intelligence and many are the tales told of their perspicacity. In summer time, when they go up to the high pastures, many hundreds from the villages of one valley are often in the care of one man. It happens that if the cows of the same village or farm do not like the pasture, they take counsel amongst themselves and, early in the summer's morning, quietly leave the mountain, following their leader sometimes as many as fifty or sixty kilometres down a way that they have only followed once and, when the evening shadows fall, the whole herd comes home.

The Basques are very fond of their animals and the cows are each called by name. The dog, however, though respected as the guardian of the house, the keeper of the flock and the family friend, is always called *Nagarro*.

The oxen, which stand yoked in pairs, are of great value. They are magnificent beasts, like the Lombardy oxen—powerful, well-trained, and of the same beautiful cream-fawn colour. Great care is taken of them.



A BASQUE INN.







## A Market Day in Tardets

They always wear a heavy linen sheet, striped with dark blue at the sides, and a white sheepskin under the wooden yoke, while a net trimmed with red pompons keeps the flies from their faces.

Lunch at the Hôtel des Pyrénées, which you enter under the arcade, was made interesting by the keen conversation of a table full of better-class Basque farmers, who talked of the relative merits of their sporting dogs—breed, training and exploits. The trout we had reminded us of the fishing fame of the little river Licq, which runs into the Saison a short way up the valley.

In the afternoon the atmosphere of the market, as usual, was one of slight inebriety; steps were unsteady, gestures vague and tongues fluent. The women kept to themselves in groups, or patronised a Spanish fortune-teller, whose blue-black hair escaped from an orange-coloured handkerchief. Even from the balcony above, it was easy to see by her expression and manner that she was a gipsy born.

With the home-returning market folk we followed the road as it winds by the river through the narrow valley between steep hills. The farther we went the thinner grew the line along the main road, as families turned aside to follow lanes and steep paths to the farmsteads far up on the mountain sides. The young men on foot swung along with a free, light stride, the coat thrown over the left shoulder, the *béret* on the side of the head. The poorer women rode sideways on their little donkeys ahead of the

## The Basque Country

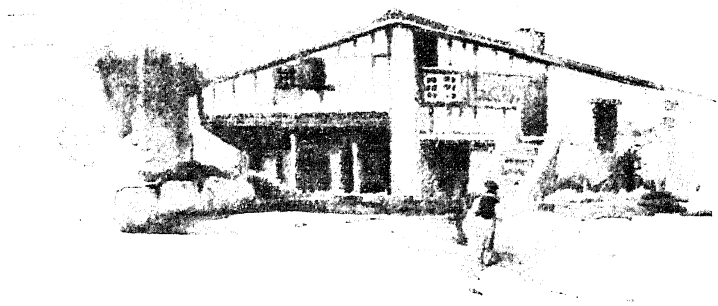
heavily laden panniers, their arms full of parcels and the inevitable umbrella. A Spanish side-saddle with a shelf for the feet, as seen in old pictures, made a comfortable seat for the woman on the back of ambling mules which carried the man astride behind. This, when the cavalier had a pretty girl seated before, was a very convenient arrangement for intimate conversation. The rich and elderly farmers, the *béret* pulled over the forehead to shade the face, were usually mounted on stout little horses, whose bridles and headstalls were of coloured leather ornamented with brass nails, and whose saddle-cloths were of homespun cloth with initials and designs inwoven, or of velvet richly embroidered. Behind the saddle the brightly coloured *bussac* hung down on each side the horse's flanks, and a sheepskin protected the rider's legs from the cold and recalled the *schappes* of the cowboy on the American plains.

At Licq we turned back. The sun, setting in a glory of rose and gold, flooded the valley in spaces of light, broken by deep purple shadows. The sky above was of turquoise blue, and where the last beams of the sun struck between the hills, it touched into transfiguration every leaf and flower of the woodside—the wild box, the spikes of blue monkshood, the white of may, the cream of elder, the snow sprays of wild cherry, the rose of wild apple, the purple jewels of the columbine, and turned the swift-flowing river to aquamarine.

Tardets was not free of the exhilaration of the

## A Market Day in Tardets

market until late in the night, when the last band of young revellers took their way homewards, breaking the mountain stillness by the wild and startling *Irrezina*, the Basque war-cry, which has echoed down the centuries.



## CHAPTER XIII

### MASCARADES AND PASTORALES

IT is in this valley of Tardets, among the peasants of the villages and of the scattered farms of the mountain, that the pastoral plays and mascarades have survived.

The pastoral plays of the Basques have nothing to distinguish them from the Breton mystery plays, except that they are still acted in the Basque country while it is many years since one was seen in Brittany. But a comparative list shows many identical subjects, such as *Godefroi de Bouillon*, *The Deliverance of Jerusalem*, *Les Quatre Fils d'Aymon*, *Geneviève de Brabant*, *Charlemagne and the Twelve Peers*, *Robert le Diable*, etc. These plays may be divided into Biblical subjects, Lives of the Saints, romances of the Middle Ages and farces.

The pastorales as they are still acted in La Soule are all that is left of the popular drama of the Middle Ages. In them has survived the memory of the mysteries and moralities acted in convents and churches on fête days, as well as the *chansons de geste*, the romances and legends which delighted knights and

## Mascarades and Pastorales

ladies in the halls of feudal castles and the people at the fairs and markets.

These dramas were written in French, in Latin and in Spanish, and only reached such unlettered centres as the Basque country and Brittany by the hands of the pedlars of books. Even to-day in Brittany you can buy these little paper books, *Lives of the Saints and legends of the country*, for a few sous each. These books, however, give the story only in outline, and it takes skill and dramatic instinct to produce from them a play which can be acted. This is what is still done in La Soule, and formerly in the other Basque provinces as well.

In every *pastorale*, whatever its theme, the Basque playwright must introduce in opposition to his heroes Satans, Turks and infidels, who are meant to typify evil in the age-long struggle against good.

The Basque *pastorales* are acted out of doors, and all the parts are taken by men and boys. The stage is usually set against the wall of some house in the central square, its wings formed by trestles covered with sheets decorated with flowers and ribbons. The entrance on the right is for the good people, and that on the left for the bad. Above the entrance for the Satans is a wooden image, called *l'idole de Mahomet*, which all the wicked must salute, and to which they address their speeches and prayers. Besides the actors, there is a rustic orchestra, which generally sits at an upper window of the house. At each of the four corners of the stage is a guard with a gun

## The Basque Country

whose duty it is to keep the audience quiet and to fire when the hero is killed.

The parts are learned during the winter evenings, and this is no light task, as a pastorelle often runs to six thousand verses and takes six, eight or ten hours to act. Finally, the day of the performance arrives. The first visit of the actors is to the barber, then to the village dressmaker, who on this occasion, as on that of a wedding, is a most important personage. The dresses are donned: Charlemagne, Abraham or Alexander wear the dress of a gendarme; Nebudchanor, the Satans and the Turks wear scarlet; the heroes, queens, princes and good folk wear blue.

Sisters and mothers hover about to add the gold chains, brooches and bits of glass which give the last touch to the costumes.

Now all is ready for the procession which, headed by the national flag, the band and the local guard, starts on a grand march around the town to call upon the mayor, the curé and any other notables. All the characters are mounted on mules or horses, the "blues," the heroes, the heroines, the queens, the princesses, the bishops and the angels riding first, followed by the "reds," the Satans, the Turks and the English. The "blues" ride decorously, but the "reds," who are mounted on fiery steeds, cause all possible commotion. Arrived at the square, the "blues" dismount and ascend the ladder leading to the stage, but the "reds" attempt first to ride up

## Mascarades and Pastorales

the steps on their chargers, then pretend to be unable to move, until finally a prayer to Mahomet enables them, too, to reach the stage.

Before the performance begins one of the actors makes the *leben pheredikia* (first sermon), which begins always with the same words: "Good people, may God give you the patience to listen to us with attention." This inevitable beginning is followed by a synopsis of the pastorate sung in a monotone. Then follows the play, which carries the stranger back to other centuries, so naïve it is: the "blues" are calm, majestic, grave; the "reds" are malicious, mischievous, dancing and jumping. All the acting is done with conviction. The actors take their rôles with great seriousness.

The play over, the *asken pheredikia* (second sermon) is recited like the first, thanking the audience for their kind attention and asking for money to help pay the expenses. After this comes a still more curious custom, the bidding for the right to dance the *saut basque* upon the stage before the audience. The competitors for the honour are the young men of the neighbouring villages who wish to show their skill. Ten, twenty, up to a hundred francs, is offered, and the highest bidder gets the floor.

In the mascarades we see a likeness to the Christmas miracles played in Oxfordshire, Dorset and other English counties within the last century. But in the Basque country it is at carnival time that in the



## The Basque Country

villages of La Soule the dances and the mascarades take place.

Imagine yourself, then, in one such village close to the pass of Ste. Engrâce. Word has come that the neighbouring village is organising a magnificent mascarade and that they intend making a visit to our village. All the youth prepare to give them a cordial reception, mindful of the fact that it may be their own turn next year.

The day arrives and the children bring the news of the approach of the masqueraders. All our village turns out to welcome—no, to oppose their entrance. For this is part of the game. Girls and boys and children with sticks and brooms form a line across the street, pretending to make a furious resistance, which is soon overcome by the visitors, with the *Cherrero* or courier at the head, who is dressed in gay colours with strings of bells around his waist and ankles. He is followed by a dancing *cantinière* and a second dancer called *Gathid*, the cat, dressed in white. Following them comes the star of the day, *Zamalzain*, of whom Chaho gives the following description :

“ Next flies, bounds, pirouettes, the master dancer, *Zamalzain*. On his head he wears an indescribable turban of gauze, crowned with pearls and paste jewels, ornamented with ribbons which fall over the shoulders and back of this handsome lad, this incomparable dancer ; Basque shoes, light and elegant, white stockings with red garters, white breeches and red

## Mascarades and Pastorales

coat—all this is less important than the horse which the dancer bestrides.

“This wicker horse has its well-rounded rump and chest covered with a saddle-cloth of red-fringed silk; its little black head, with its arched neck, carries a bridle with a silver bell; it has no legs, but is winged. The lad holds the reins in his left hand and cracks a whip in his right. The saddle-cloth falls below the dancer’s knees—you see only his feet beneath. He dances, he twists, he seems never to touch the ground, the road is hardly wide enough for the marvellous evolutions which he executes.”

Next in the *cortège* come the *Kukuilleros*, who form the suite of *Zamalzain*, dancing and gambolling behind him two by two. Three blacksmiths come next, ready to shoe *Zamalzain’s* horse. They are dressed in red coats, white trousers, great aprons of yellow leather, red caps falling over one ear, and carry nails and hammer. Next arrives the gentleman *Jaona*, with sword and cane, dressed in frock-coat and top hat, with his wife *Anderia* on his arm; then the peasant *Laboraria*, and his wife *Laborarisa*; next come two Hungarians, *Kherestonak*, in coat and breeches of velvet, top boots, and bright cravat floating on the breast; next, two knife-grinders, master and servant, *Chorrotchak*, with great leather aprons, old soft hats and the tools of their trade, who bombard the company with original verse, improvised on the moment, and sung to the tune of *Au clair de la lune*; following

## The Basque Country

them arrives *Bontame-Jaon*, the gipsy-gentleman, who carries a gun and looks a robber, leading his gipsy band; then, leaping, bounding, dancing, come the coppersmiths, *Kaouterak*, with their poor little donkey loaded with pots and pans, the apothecary, the doctor, the barber with an immense wooden razor, and finally the beggars in rags.

The procession dances in this order through the streets, calls on the notables of the village, receiving gifts, money and wine, and then goes on to the square to dance the *farandole*. *Zamalzain*, *Jaon* and *Laboraria* invite the young girls of the best families to join in this, and their example is followed by the others, and soon the dancers of both sexes in a long chain are winding hand in hand through the measures of the dance.

The *farandole* is followed by the real entertainment of the day, the ballet, danced within a circle traced by *Cherrero*,—a succession of marvellous *pas seuls*, which are but a prelude to *Zamalzain's* final effort, the goblet dance, *gobalet dantzà*.

A glass full of wine is placed in the centre of the circle. Around this glass *Zamalzain* dances the steps laid down by tradition, then, planting his left foot upon the glass, he makes the sign of the cross in the air with his right foot, bounds as high as possible, and returns to earth without upsetting the glass or spilling a drop of the wine. It is danced to the following ancient tune :

# Mascarades and Pastorales

## MUTCHIKOAK.



The *Zamalzain's* dance is followed by square dances, in which the other various characters take part,

## The Basque Country

and the fête ends with the *saut basque*, danced by all the masqueraders.

Every stage of the mascarade has a special tune, some of which are modern, others of which are as old as the fifteenth century.

Since August 1914 the Basque valleys have known no dancing, no mascarades or pastorales. Now that the shadow of war has lifted, let us hope that the music and the dance which seem so natural an expression of the versatile Basque character may be revived once more.



## CHAPTER XIV

### MAULÉON, LE PLUS FORT CHASTEL DE GUYENNE

FROM Tardets the river flows, ever broadening, through a smiling valley, fresh woodland, green meadow and rich pasture to Mauléon, the capital of the province of La Soule. From there, a wide and shallow though swift-running stream, it continues its course to Sauveterre, where it loses itself in the Gave d'Oloron.

Mauléon is dominated by the remains of the ancient fortress of Malo Leone on its hill. Once formidable, holding armed hosts at bay, "le plus fort Chastel de Guyenne assis sur un moult hault rocq," as the old chronicler says, it is now peopled only with spring flowers. The roofless *salle des gardes* is brave with lilac and rose, wallflowers spring from the creviced masonry and stand in straight ranks of gold against the grey, and from every loophole and crenellation valerian thrusts its dusty foliage and heads of pink and white. Yet this was once a stronghold of the English kings in Guyenne. It was held for the English in the fifteenth century by Louis de Beaumont, lieutenant of the Duke of Gloucester. La Soule was, at that date, torn by the feuds of de Luxe and

## The Basque Country

de Grammont. Louis de Beaumont favoured the de Luxe faction, and it is he who is supposed to be the Governor of the Castle referred to in the favourite Basque *complainte* called *La Chanson de Bertereche*. This song has immortalised one incident only of many in that long chain of civil wars, an incident which evidently touched the imagination and sympathies of the people. It is a very good example of these poetic legends, of which others well known are *Errege Jan* (already given), *Urrutiako Anderia* or The Lady of Ruthie, *Atharratze Janregiko Anderia* or The Lady of the Château of Tardets, and *Egun Bereko Albarguntsa* or The Widow of the Wedding Day. In all these legends of the Basque country, as in the *guerz* of Brittany, you find a vivid picture of the life of the times. In a verse of such a ballad the whole past relives more strikingly than in many pages of history. The song of Bertereche tells of sorrow in the valley of the Andoce, that little valley which you may follow from Larrau to Licq, near Tardets. Like all these ballads, this is dramatic in its simplicity.

The valley of Andoce,  
Oh, the long valley,  
Three times it has broken my heart.

Young Bertereche from his bed  
Speaks to the servant kindly,  
“ Look : do you see any men ? ”

The servant replies  
That she can see  
Thirty men prowling from window to window.

## Mauléon

Bertereche from his window  
Parleys with the Seigneur Count,  
Offering him a hundred heifers with a bull at their head.

The Seigneur Count replies  
Like a traitor,  
“ Bertereche, come down to the door ; fear nothing.”

“ Mother, give me my best linen shirt,  
It may be for the last time ;  
This Easter Monday will be long remembered.”

Oh, the long journey of Marie-Santz  
Down the hill of Bost Mendicta ;  
She has entered the house of Bustanoby du Lacarry on her knees.

“ Young Bustanoby,  
My beloved brother,  
If you do not help me my son is lost.”

“ Be quiet, my sister ;  
I pray you, do not weep.  
Your son, if he lives, is perhaps now at Mauléon.”

Oh, that long journey of Marie-Santz  
To the door of the Seigneur Count.  
“ Aie, aie, Seigneur, where is my gallant son ? ”

“ Had you no other son  
Than Bertereche ?  
Then he is dead near Espeldoy ; go and find him.”

Oh, the people of Espeldoy,  
The unfeeling people,  
Who harboured the dead and pretended they knew it not !



## The Basque Country

The daughter of Espeldoy  
Is named Marguerite ;  
Her hands are dabbled with the blood of Bertereche.

The washing at Espeldoy,  
Oh, what a rich washing !  
Three dozen linen shirts, so they say, of the young Bertereche.

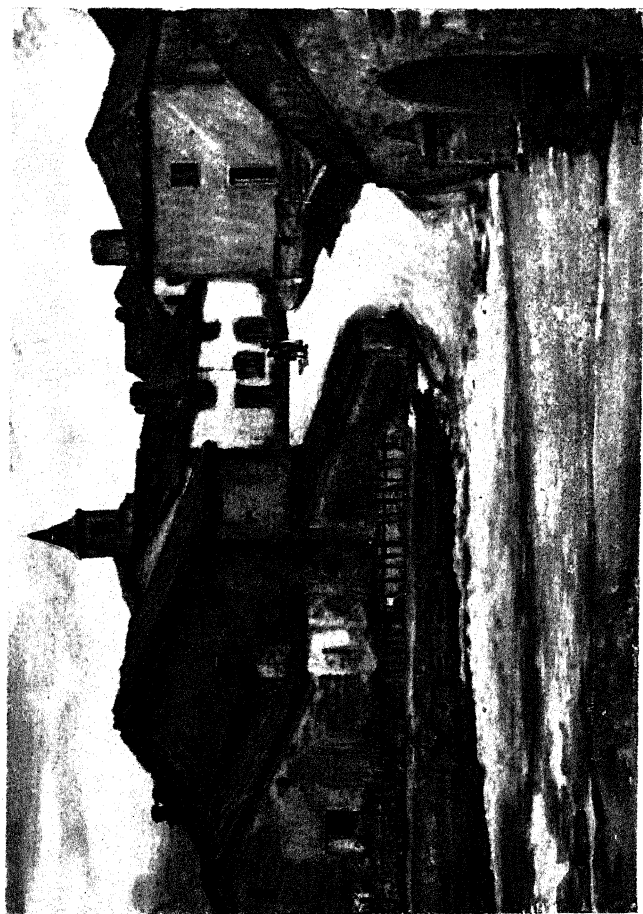
Near the village of Etchebar stands to-day the house of Espeldoy, and in the farmyard is the cross which marks the spot where young Bertereche was so foully murdered. This was only one of the murders with pillage that held all the country in a state of terror. The last stanza, in the usual allusive form, conveys the fact of the pillage of the house.

This story, like the others mentioned, is a rhymed version of current incident, probably by some local *improvisateur*, for this gift of improvisation is still found among the Basques of La Soule. In almost every village there is some one so dowered, who will improvise for you at any length in passable rhyme on any given theme.

From the Château a road leads through fields to the old town. There, a very wide, irregularly paved street runs steeply down between sixteenth and seventeenth century houses of deep eaves and broad doorways to a market square at the bottom. It is an open square with the arched rose-coloured walls of the *pelote* court at one end, and a large oval basin of water at the side on whose broad margin children sit and play. Grey-green plane trees are planted in



A BASQUE VILLAGE.





## Mauléon

a double row around, between whose gnarled trunks the white awnings of the market stalls are stretched to-day.

Under the deep arcade of a pale grey house close by, a tall woman in black stands at ease beside her mouse-coloured donkey. Up the street to the left comes a girl, bearing on her head a classic water jug of terra-cotta, while outside the drinking shops the great oxen stand chewing the cud and flicking their tails lazily.

The pale grey and buff of the grey-shuttered houses, the grey-green of the plane trees, the grey of mountain asses, the buff of the oxen, accentuated by the black dresses of the crowds, remain as a memory of beautiful and distinguished colour.

From the old town the road leads down and takes you by a bridge over the river to the pleasant promenade under the chestnuts, which is the centre of the life of the modern town. Here, at the corner, is the fine Renaissance Château of Andurain.

The modern town has little to impress one. It does not recall, as do the still imposing ruins of the old fortress, the great rôle played by Mauléon for so many centuries; for La Soule has always been the heart of the *pays basque*, the province where the ancient customs were most jealously preserved. Through all changes, as its allegiance was transferred during the centuries by treaty from one sovereign to another, it still kept its liberty, its own individuality. Here, alone, were all men equal. The poorest

## The Basque Country

citizen had the same rights as the highest noble. Every man could own and bequeath property to his descendants, every man could pay for treason at the block, both privileges reserved for the nobility in France. They levied no taxes for the king, though they acknowledged no other head than he.

The province was governed by an assembly representing the three estates—though the clergy took small part—and this assembly was convoked by the governor of Mauléon. The nobles met for a day and deliberated. The result was transmitted to thirteen representatives of the third estate, the people, who returned to their divisions to report and to consider the questions under discussion. A fortnight later these representatives met the clergy and nobles to state the opinions of the people of their divisions, and at these meetings any citizen had the right to be present.

You imagine that you can read the result of the centuries of respect for the dignity of man in the very faces and carriage of the Basques of La Soule. Even more than elsewhere in the Basque country, you recognise and admire here the open look, the high carriage, the noble freedom, which must certainly be the expression of the just laws which prevailed at a time when the people in other countries had no rights.

When the French Revolution swept France, in the days of reconstruction that attended the birth

## Mauléon

of the Republic, La Soule, like other provinces, was summoned to sacrifice her ancient customs.

The assembly was convened to consider whether the province should obey the call, and the speech which turned the scale for the Republic is amusing. The orator draws a picture of the French as light-minded, frivolous, ignorant of liberty for a thousand years, and proceeds: "In this reconstruction we have less to do than has France, for we have never lost our liberty. The ancient constitution of France was almost as good as ours, but she lost hers a thousand years ago. We have the fortune to be poor; luxury has not corrupted us; we love our fathers, our mothers, our wives, our children. Our country counts to us for much. We have not lost the courage of our forefathers; their customs and virtues are ours.

"What have we to fear in any new order? Our people are brave. They are ready to die for their honour and their liberty, but we are few and weak, and we stand between two strong powers. We need one as a prop. If we break from France, we shall be at the mercy of Spain. We shall no longer be a free people, but slaves."

And the decision stood that "the welfare of the country and the good of the empire can only be found in the union of all parts in one." Thus passed the *fors* of La Soule. Unity was vital to the life of the new Republic, and France has had no better citizens, no better soldiers or sons than the Basques.

It was on the morning of the battle of Jena that



## The Basque Country

the Emperor Napoleon, passing by the 4th Light Infantry, a regiment composed of Basques, remarked :

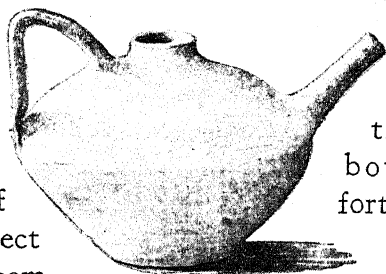
“ You have a beautiful regiment, Colonel.”

“ More brave than beautiful, Sire,” replied the Colonel Harispé.

“ We shall see,” the Emperor answered.

That night, after the victorious day, the Colonel, made a General on the field, was carried wounded to Napoleon to offer the homage of his three brothers killed that day on the field of honour.

Maréchal Harispé is the Basque hero of arms as St. Francis Xavier is the Basque saint. Both were born of the country. At Lacarre is the house where the Maréchal lived and died at eighty-six in the country he had loved and defended. At Jaxu is the pilgrimage chapel to which on March 12, by mountain paths and country roads, crowds of pious pilgrims wend their way to the shrine of the great missionary saint, who, in the sixteenth century, faced untold privations and dangers that he might carry the gospel of Christ to such far lands as Japan, Mozambique, Coromandel and Malacca, only to die on the island of Sancian, the land to which he was bound, at the early age of forty-six, before his great project of entering China was accom-



## CHAPTER XV

### ST. JEAN-PIED-DE-PORT—THE STORY OF A LITTLE TOWN

AS its name in every form indicates—*Santi Johannis Pede portiensi, San Juan del pie de puerto, St. Jean-Pied-de-Port, Donajouna*—this town at the foot of the pass into Spain has always had a certain importance from the Roman days down through the centuries. Always a military centre, the territory under its guardianship was the key to the safety of the realm. This territory reaches from the Pic d'Orly on the west, through the forest of Iraty, to the Cols d'Orgambide and Bentarte, follows the Spanish frontier to the Pic de Lindux, takes in the Aldudes, the Baztan, Baïgorry and the town of Ossès; within this area there are no less than eleven passes into Spain: Col d'Iraty, Col d'Orbaïceta, Col de Bentarte (by which lies the old Roman route over the peaks), Col d'Ibañeta, Col de Lindux, Col de Bendaritz, pass of Aldudes to Elizondo, Col d'Ispeguy, Col d'Arieta, the pass of Aarfa to Bidarray and the pass at Ainhoea.

The mere writing of these names calls up the wild beauty of the country, a country even to-day but

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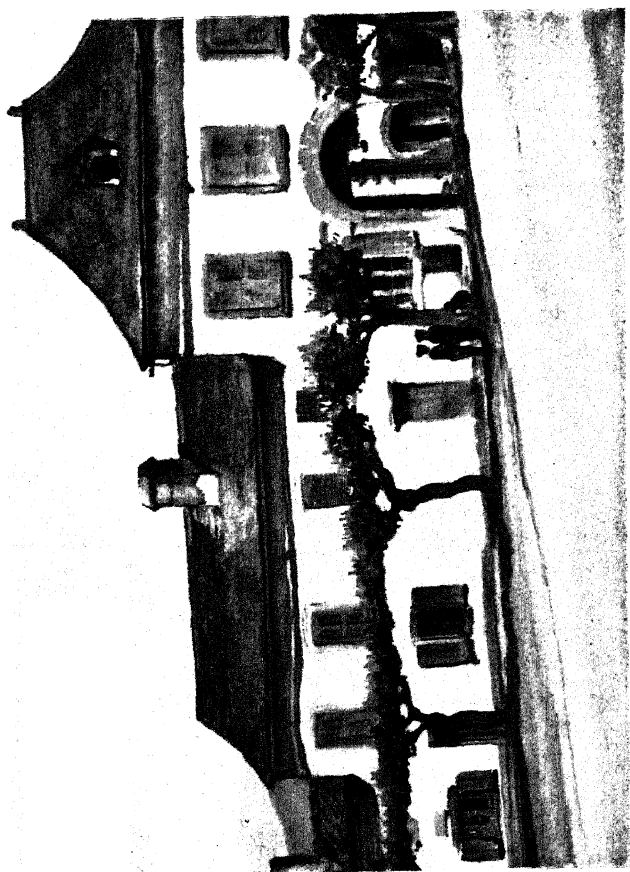
sparsely settled, and where the deep valleys leading to the passes are divided by steep, wooded hills rising to the bare black peaks, Pic-nérés, which have given their name to the range—Pyrenees. A perfect country in which to play at military hide-and-seek, as Wellington found in the last century. A thousand years ago and more it must have been full of unknown dangers a savage country indeed when Rome, tracing her great road from Bayonne to Pampeluna along the heights, founded a settlement, three kilometres from St. Jean-Pied-de-Port, where St. Jean-le-Vieux now stands. To-day all that remains of it is a mound where the spade brings to light trivial evidence of the long-dead empire—evidence, whether in shard or coin or mosaic, which you can never behold without a thrill.

It was in the eighth century that the barbarians made a swift descent upon this settlement, burnt it and drove out the inhabitants, who fled to the nearest hill for refuge, that which dominates the present town of St. Jean-Pied-de-Port. One can imagine the terror, the haste with which they fortified the heights, determined never to return to the undefended valley. Here, from their nucleus, tradition says, Garcia Ziminez I, King of Navarre, founded the town of St. Jean-Pied-de-Port in 716.

An Arab geographer in 1154 writes of the place as possessing a fine church. But the *château fort* on the hill-top was the most important feature of the town. Under its protection the houses huddled up



ST. JEAN-PIED-DE-PORT.





## St. Jean-Pied-de-Port

the hillside, and in order to be doubly safe, a strong wall was built enclosing houses, church and Château.

The governor of the Château was called the Alcaïd; his full title was *Châtelain de St. Jean et Garde de la Terre d'Outre Porte*. He was not only head of the garrison, with the custody of the arms and ammunition, but he also administered justice and imposed the taxes for the whole territory.

He had the right to a tithe on every mill, oven, and winepress in the territory, which very considerable revenue he shared with his suzerain, the King of Navarre. The town, though of Navarre, was not under the *fors* of Navarre, but had its own special rights which were confirmed by the King in 1329 and jealously guarded down to the Revolution.

In addition to the regular tithes already mentioned, the records in Pampeluna prove how constantly the governor requisitioned the people for rations and labour. In 1360 Charles le Mauvais ordered the fortress to be repaired: "All are expected to contribute and aid in the work. Take any who are disobedient or rebellious, seize their goods and throw them into prison."

In time of trouble, the governor had the right to call up nobles, priests and inhabitants from any part of his territory to garrison the fortress. We find in the records that in 1315 he called up eight men from Ossès, twenty miles distant, who refused to serve and petitioned the King for exemption thereafter.

Another of the governor's duties was to aid the



## The Basque Country

pilgrims of St. Jacques on their way. It was in the sixth century that St. Jacques became the patron saint of Spain. He had preached in Judæa and had come into Spain to spread the gospel of Christ. There he had retired to an oratory in Salduba, which has since been famed as the shrine of *Notre Dame de Pilar*. He later returned to Jerusalem, and after his death by the sword in the reign of Herod Agrippa, the King of Spain asked for his body, which was received and interred at Compostela. When the Basques of Basse and Haute Navarre united with the Spanish to defend the country from the invasions of the Moors, they took St. Jacques as their patron saint and with the Spaniards fought in his honour.

The pilgrimage of St. Jacques was the most popular of the Middle Ages. It was undertaken by all classes of the community as an act of devotion and mortification. The pilgrims went bare-foot, dressed in one garment, and carried a staff six feet long and a gourd. They followed well-defined routes, *chemins de St. Jacques*, along which the pious won much praise by building chapels, hostels and inns for their use. One much frequented route came by Bordes, Cosaile, Sames, Bergovey, Lacarre, St. Jean-le-Vieux (chapel), La Madeleine (chapel), St. Jean-Pied-de-Port, Uhart-Cize, Moccasail, Arnéguy, Col d'Ibañeta (chapel) to Roncevaux (great hostel). When the watchman announced the arrival of a band of pilgrims at the fortress, a guard of soldiers was deputed to meet and escort them on their way. But such escort could not

## St. Jean-Pied-de-Port

take them far, and we read in the *Codex de Compostela*, written in the fourteenth century : “ You arrive at the pass of Cize in the Basque country. This country, where they speak a barbarous tongue, is full of forests and mountains, without bread, wine, or any other food but apples and milk. In this region brigands haunt the villages of Ostabat, St. Jean (Pied-de-Port) and St. Michel. These men will be damned eternally because they lie in wait to fall upon the pilgrims with javelins and wrest unjust tribute from them.

“ If the travellers refuse to give the money demanded, they are beaten and insulted, and robbed. These people are savages, uncultivated and barbarous, and their appearance is as terrible as their speech. They ought only to levy tribute upon the merchants, but they seize whatever they can get from the pilgrims and other travellers.

“ For this reason we demand : that the guardians of the pass, the King of Aragon and other princes who receive tribute from these fellows, as well as all persons who are parties to such extortion, such as Raymond de Soule, Bebian de Grammont, le Vicomte de St. Michel, with their descendants, Arnaud de Gingue and his posterity, also the priests who give the sacrament of penance and the eucharist to those people or who celebrate the mass for them and receive them in their churches, that all these should be excommunicated, not only by their bishops, but in the church of St. Jacques at Compostela in the presence of the pilgrims.”

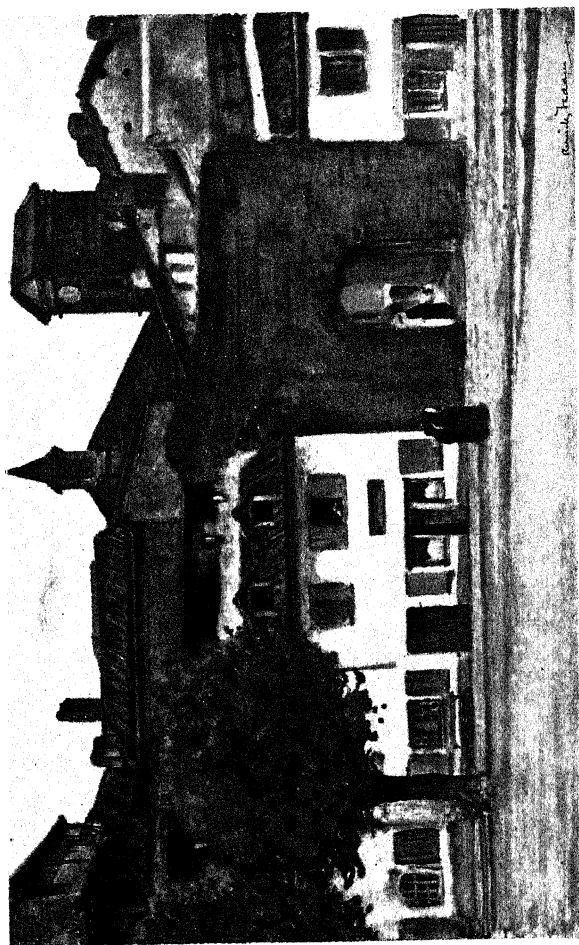
## The Basque Country

The more we read in the ancient archives of the history of this little town, the more do we realise that the normal condition of its life, and the life of the Basque country, was for centuries one of continual warfare: La Soule, Navarre, Guipuzcoa, Labourd and Béarn were for three centuries the theatre of a blood-thirsty feud between the rival factions of de Luxe and de Grammont. These two powerful families divided the Basque country into two rival camps, de Luxe champion of the Catholic party, and de Grammont the head of the Protestant faction.

Navarre was dismembered in 1512, divided into Haute and Basse Navarre, and by the treaty of the Pyrenees in 1569 Basse-Navarre became part of France. But no change of overlord stopped the local dissensions. In 1560 Jeanne d'Albret abjured the Catholic faith, and the fire of the religious wars swept over the country. On her command, the Protestant religion was preached in the towns of La Soule and Basse-Navarre. The de Grammont faction joined with Montgomery to enforce these commands, abolishing mass, razing the churches and persecuting the priests. Opposed to them were de Luxe, d'Echaux, d'Amen-daritz and their followers. In 1569 Montgomery took Mauléon and pushed on to St. Jean-Pied-de-Port. "As the Queen wished to convert all Basse-Navarre to her religion, she sent Baron d'Arros, a Béarnais gentleman, with 220 well-armed men to St. Jean, to force the people to submit to her will. He conferred with the governor, begging him to exhort the men



GATE IN OLD WALL, ST. JEAN-PIED-DÈ-PORT.



Rev. J. H. ...



## St. Jean-Pied-de-Port

and women to practise the instructions preached by the Protestant ministers, under penalty, if they disobeyed, of fire and sword. The Catholics firmly replied that they would continue in their ancient religion. Seeing that they could not shake the faith of the Basques, the baron and his men retired." The sack of the town by Montgomery followed. The church was fortified. The Catholic chiefs, under de Luxe, attacked, took St. Jean, and reprisals were taken upon the partisans of the Queen.

In 1584 the people, weary of the terror of sword and fire, appealed to the King for protection. Charles le Mauvais called the offending parties to the thirteenth-century church of Notre Dame at St. Jean-Pied-de-Port. Here appeared Armand Raymond de Grammont, Chevalier Seigneur et Baron de Grammont, Bidache, Baïgorry, Bordes, etc., and Arnaut Sanche de Tardets, Chevalier Seigneur de Luxe, Ostabat, Tardets, Ahaxe, etc. After hearing the quarrel, the King declared the differences to be annulled, imposed silence on all parties, and ordered the offenders jointly to build a chapel celebrating their peace. But when the King had departed the quarrels broke out again, and civil war continued to rage.

Such were the vicissitudes to which this little town was subject down to the beginning of the seventeenth century. The seventeenth century in France held no respite for the people, as taxes were ever more oppressive, and the history of this one little mountain town, typical of so many hundreds more, pursued



## The Basque Country

its course to its logical conclusion, the French Revolution.

When, in answer to the demand of the nation, Louis XVI determined to convoke the Tiers-Etat in Paris, excitement ran high and hope awoke in the little town of St. Jean-Pied-de-Port. Was it possible that, after hundreds of years of exploitation, the King would give the people justice ?

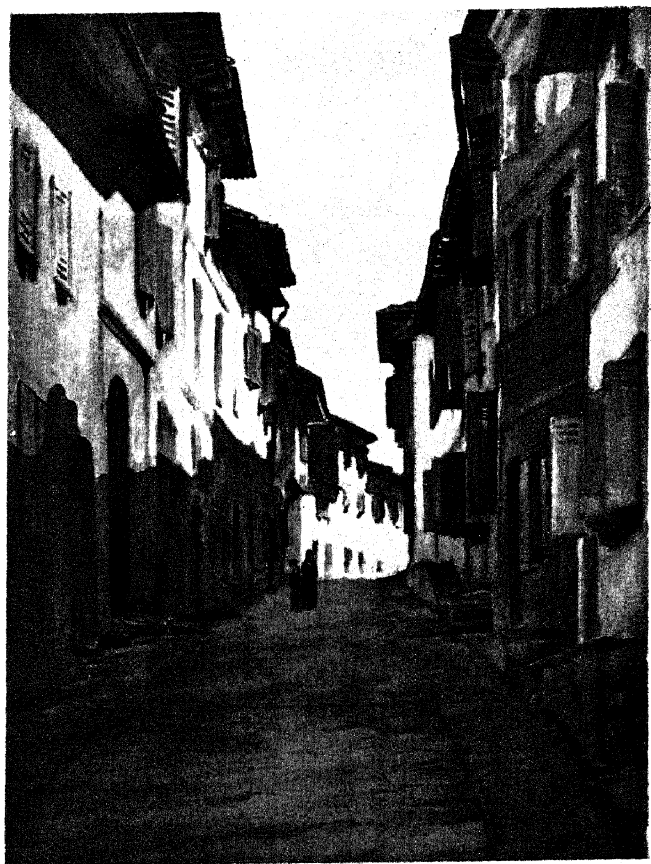
A public meeting of all classes was held in 1789, in the Hôtel de Ville on the little Place, "to consider the great question"—we quote from the minutes of that meeting—"which is of interest to the whole nation, that is, a just, free and equal representation of the Third Estate (the people), and the just apportionment of taxes amongst all the subjects of the King." Expressing their loyal devotion to his Majesty, they implore both him and his ministers, "who have shown such a noble courage in their reply to the universal demand," to influence the privileged classes, the nobles and the clergy, who are "so used to exploiting their privileges that they do not realise the injustices inflicted on the people."

At the close of this meeting, which was distinguished by a calm and tolerant spirit, six members were chosen as a committee to draw up a memoir for the King. On this committee were two priests, one noble, the mayor and two tradesmen, and the minutes were signed by all present.

The committee drew up a paper asking: (1) For proportionate taxation. They state that in 1789, of



STREET IN OLD TOWN, ST. JEAN-PIED-DE-PORT.





## St. Jean-Pied-de-Port

the 118,123 francs raised in taxes in the province, the nobles and clergy together only contributed 10,942 francs, while the Third Estate, the people, paid 107,181 francs. (2) They ask that in all future representation, as the clergy always vote with the nobles, there should be a representation of the Third Estate equal to that of clergy and nobles. (3) They ask that justice for Basse-Navarre should be administered there, and not in Béarn. Forty-six signatures were appended, and the paper was forwarded to the King "as the expression of the interest of the citizens of this town in the happiness and prosperity of the nation and the prosperity of the kingdom of Navarre."

How signally such moderate demands failed of fulfilment, how vacillation and misjudgment ended in bloodshed, we all know. The change from toleration to violence is well seen in the comparison of the above memoir and of the following letter from the Sans-Culottes of St. Jean-Pied-de-Port to the Sans-Culottes of Paris on the execution of Louis XVI :

"We thank you for our deliverance from the Vampire who for so long has drunk our blood. As long as the Monster lived, his impure breath would have infected the healthful air of our mountains, and our dissensions would have been constant. We have long groaned under the yoke, as have our brothers in the eighty-four other departments. Like them, we saw that the cause of our dissent lay in Hugues Capet. We are not afraid to tell you now that you . . . have given us ground in the past to fear that you

## The Basque Country

would not act for the public good. But the events of the 15th, 17th, 19th and 21st of January have restored our faith.

“Despots are forming a coalition to overthrow the superb structure of our liberty. Let the tyrants tremble! Their fate is sealed. They will learn that men filled with the sacred love of country are capable of all.

“Hasten to arm us for vengeance, and you shall see our proud mountains fall down before the tricolour flag and open a free passage to the defenders of liberty. Hasten to adopt a constitution worthy of the people you represent, that from all the great Republic you may hear the cry ‘You have done well for your country.’

“The Society of Sans-Culottes, Friends of Liberty and Equality, at St. Jean-Pied-de-Port.”

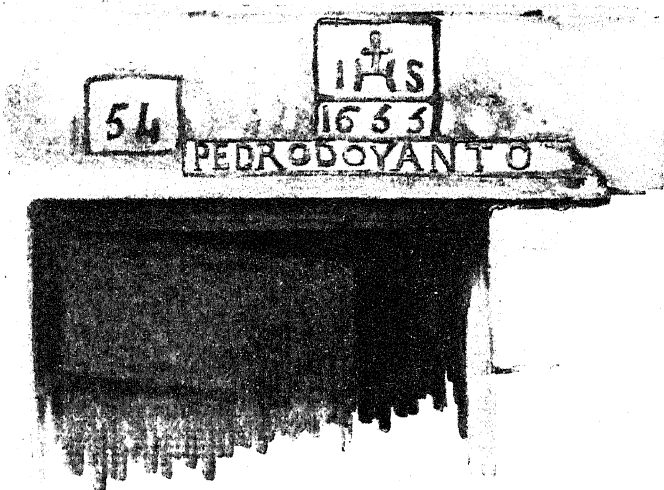
Yet the response of this little town to the new order was not only one of words: for, when summoned to give a supreme proof of devotion to the new Republic, Basse-Navarre was not found wanting. The great work of social reorganisation began by an appeal to sacrifice. On the altar of a common country every province was called upon to lay its rights, its privileges, its immunities, that France might be one. The feeling in Navarre, in La Soule, in Labourd and in Béarn was intense. Should they submit? Should they, could they, sacrifice their sacred and ancient *fors*? What do we read in the archives of St. Jean-Pied-de-Port? “Encouraged by the example of other provinces in the kingdom, who have re-

## St. Jean-Pied-de-Port

nounced their privileges, we are unanimously resolved to sacrifice to the country our ancient constitution."

That is how the Basques of this little town proved themselves worthy of the great gift of liberty, and prepared to sign the oath of allegiance to the Republic of France, which stands in the old archives in the words :

"We swear to maintain the law as decreed by the National Assembly, to suppress Royalty, to uphold the Republic, to respect property, to assure the liberty of citizens, to make our subordinates respect discipline and military rule, to oppose all invasion of the territory of the Republic. We swear death to tyrants, peace to the cottage, brotherhood to the people, and to live and die free."





## CHAPTER XVI

### *THE SCHOOLMASTER*

OF all places in the world where a friend of the country is useful, nay, indispensable, the Basque towns stand amongst the first. Unless you have a kindly interpreter, not only of the language but of customs, you are not going to get far under the appearance of things, which, as we know, is deceitful. How kind Fate sometimes is to the real aspirant! No one could have imagined that the need of fixative would lead to the chemist, and the chemist point the way to the schoolmaster, who, in turn, was to hold the key to all the Basque mysteries in Basse-Navarre. But so it was. The schoolmaster, so the chemist said, was interested in old things, in the old days. He could be found at the school, on the road out of the village, after four. We were there. The uncompromising school building met us with blank unresponse. No answer, the door surely shut, and we were turning away, when an upper window opened and a round and rosy old woman poked out her be capped head. Her son was absent, but she was evidently deeply gratified to hear that strangers knew of his pet hobby.

## The Schoolmaster

A note was left, and the evening saw the schoolmaster drinking coffee and cognac in our bleak sitting-room at the inn. The instant he entered the room we knew that he was an enthusiast. He was small and wiry. He was middle-aged. His face was pale, his eyes weak, his hair unkempt, his coat shabby—but he breathed enthusiasm, and the joy of finding an audience not uncongenial to his pursuits fairly irradiated him. Poor man, he seldom met anyone, it seemed, who cared to hear of what was his life-work—the real work of his life—pursued in odd moments, in holidays and late into the nights of winter. The history of the towns and villages of his province was to him a passion. Archives, dusty, musty old papers, were his joy. To supply some missing link in the story of the smallest hamlet, he would willingly go on his knees to Pampeluna, where he assured us most of the records of Navarre are to be found. The visit ended in a meeting arranged for the following day.

This time he met us at the schoolroom door, his feet in white espadrilles, a sack coat of blue serge on his back and a floating black tie under his chin. His mother, rounder and rosier than ever, hovered behind him surreptitiously brushing the dust from his coat and filled with pride. Then he showed us his treasures. In one corner of the dreary, desk-filled room was a table on a small platform within reach of a narrow set of shelves. These shelves were filled with small manuscript books, each bearing the name of a town or village, and each the fruit of patient work, of loving

## The Basque Country

research and careful transcription. What tender pride lighted his face as he lifted the little volumes, eagerly turning the pages to show plans, postcards, photographs, inscriptions which helped to their illustration. He ended with a sweep of the arm: "They are yours, Madame. Anything that you can use." Then he seized his *béret*, cutting short the grateful speeches, and waved us to the door, talking fast now about the walk we were to take. But the little mother clearly did not feel that the *béret* was the headgear for the occasion, for she circumvented him at the door, seized it and forced a battered straw hat into his unwilling hand. He looked at it as if he had never seen it before, rammed it on his head and led the way. How he talked and how fast he walked! We plunged down through a wood and were soon out into the country road, going, we discovered, to see some houses, as he was sure that we did not understand the Basque dwellings. Lasse was the first village, where we arrived somewhat out of breath.

We came up to the little square through a lovely lane. Men, women and children knew the school-master. It was a blaze of colour, wistaria blue against the salmon-pink and red of the balconied houses, along whose fronts hung strings of red peppers, dried beans and maize. In the tiny square the school-master stood still and uncovered. "It was here," he said solemnly, "that Charlemagne stopped. In the old days Lasse had a hostel for the pilgrims. Charlemagne has trod this very square. When you

## The Schoolmaster

go to Arnéguy up this valley, look out for the mill, Moulin de Faigasse. It is built on the foundations of the Commanderie of Moccosail. It was there that Charlemagne held a council of twenty bishops: Mon-Conseil, which was corrupted into Moccosail." He waved his arms, waxing eloquent. "When you go," he said, "to Roncevaux, what will you see? The slopes are gentle, the passes between the mountains are wide and easy. There are none of those wild defiles, those steep paths that we imagine. The Pass of Roncevaux which is represented in legend as a terrible gorge, between steep rocks, is a valley winding and tranquil. The mountain d'Altabiscar rises to the east in a long sweep where the pink heather grows. An old convent with crenellated walls bars the route to Pampeluna. A charming path leads down through the shadow of the beech trees to the grassy hills crowned by the old chapel of Ibañeta. Here was the battlefield of Roncevaux, where Roland died. There is not one single rock from which the Basques could have rolled the fabled stones on the troops of Charlemagne! They won that battle by sheer fighting." Thus did the schoolmaster explode one fiction of the guide-books. He looked a very Don Quixote tilting at the age-old windmill.

As we climbed from the valley to higher ground, we saw the distant gathering storm-clouds. The straight road before us ran through farm lands. Farmhouses stood to left and right, wide-roofed, spacious, clean and prosperous. Before each the

## The Basque Country

schoolmaster stopped to translate the Basque inscription on the stone above the door. One read : " Pause and reflect upon your last hour—you will not regret it." Another, more cheerful, ran : " May peace be in this house."

In the face of the gathering storm we went down the hill, between the pretty white houses of Uhart, and then we knew what the schoolmaster had brought us to see, a most perfect example of a Basque homestead in all its spacious dignity. It was three storeys high, five windows across; the wide eaves of the roof, the balcony, and the shutters were painted hedge-sparrow blue. A vine festooned the whitewashed front above the lower windows. The doorway was ample and arched, and, above, a stone tablet bore a cross and the date 1610.

The schoolmaster led us through the gate in the wall of the grassed fore-court, and was met at the door by an elderly man of assured manner and dignified presence, to whom we were introduced and who led us into the great hall, called in Basque *L'Ey Kabatcia*. It was a vast empty place, with a stone-paved floor and beamed ceiling. Its only furniture were two great oak chests. Two flights of stairs led from here to the upper regions. In their kindness our two hosts talked together, explaining the many uses of this room. Here, in poorer houses, the carts and harness and tools are nightly housed. Here the feasts of the year are held—the harvest feasts when the grain is threshed or the corn is shucked, the

## The Schoolmaster

celebration of the annual pig-killing. Here the domestic festivals of marriage and birth take place, and here, too, the wake is held. The schoolmaster snapped his fingers. "Dance!" he cried. "Dance!—the Basque dances; and the master plays cards here on a Sunday—*Muss*, four partners, a great game, when the women are out of the way." Our stately host chuckled and led us into the kitchen at the left. Like all the Basque kitchens, a place of order, cleanliness and cheer, with its blue-and-white tiled walls, its huge fireplace, its polished buffet-dresser filled with plates and pewter, its table with the red-squared oilcloth. Near the door hung the holy-water stoup with a sprig of box above it, while the walls were very gay with the flamboyant chromos of saints sold in the ambulant bazaars of the market. On the mantelpiece stood a crucifix, the calendar of *postes et télégraphes*, and all the photographs of the family. The kitchen is the centre of the family life, and it is here in the long winter evenings that the circle, enlarged by the addition of a neighbour or two, sit by the fire of logs and entertain one another with song and story. From the kitchen the door opened into the dining-room. The third room back was the dairy which led into the hall. Upstairs we found the bedrooms, large and exquisitely clean, with floors of polished oak, filled with massive old furniture.

It was easy to imagine the patriarchal life of this house. Up at daybreak, an early breakfast of coffee or milk. The father gives the signal to the sons to

## The Basque Country

start for the fields. The mother and the daughters prepare the breakfast for eight o'clock, ham, bread and cheese, to which the men return. The younger men drive the carts or do the ploughing, but they work under the eye of the elders. The girls work in the house, and in the fields when it is necessary. There are odd distinctions as to what woman may or may not do. She may not use the scythe, she may not milk, nor take charge of the wine. She may not kill a pig, but she may kill a lamb. She may not sew. She may weed the cornfield and the vineyard, feed the oxen, raise the ducks and the chickens. She may make the bread, but the man lights the oven fire; she may spin and shuck the corn; she may split osier for tying the vines and husk the chestnuts; she may pluck the hedgehog; but always she must keep her place, although the Basque law has always given her the right to hold and dispose of property. "Tout de même," our host ended with a smile, "*l'homme est toujours homme, même dans le panier*"\*; and leading the way to the stone bench outside the house along the wall where the household sit on summer evenings, he told us the Basque story. "There was a woman, a masterful woman,—such there are even in the Basque country,—who married a little man no higher than her shoulder. She was a very clever woman and he was a useless little man, and, as time went on, she grew more and more bored and tired of her bargain. So she finally decided that she could not stand him any

\* The man is always master, even in the basket.

## The Schoolmaster

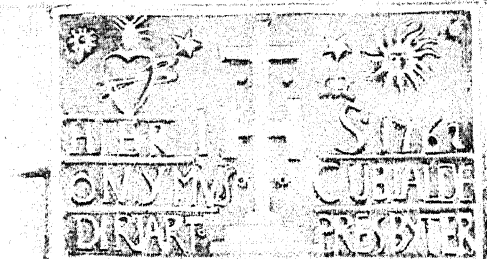
longer and that she would drown him. So she put him in a basket and started with the basket on her head for the river. Now the woman, although so clever, was afraid of a dog, and as she passed by a farm a great black hound sprang out barking furiously. Terrified she screamed: 'Oh, my man, shout at this ferocious beast with your great voice and frighten him away.' 'I will shout if you will put down the basket.' 'Shout, shout,' she cried and lowered the basket. Her husband gave one fierce growl and the dog ran away. The little man stepped out proudly: 'Ah, my woman,' he said, 'you see a man is always a man, even in the basket.' So they walked back together and the woman respected him ever after."

The old man puffed at his pipe. "We trust our women," he said. "They rule the house—eh, schoolmaster? It is the wife who keeps the granary key." "That is the cheque-book of the modern," the schoolmaster explained. "Here comes your daughter." "They return from the river. It is the washing day." The women, daughter, niece and granddaughter of our host, who all lived under the same roof, came to greet us in their tucked-up skirts, red petticoats and bare feet, with a manner full of personal dignity. They were well-proportioned, dark-haired women with the mobile features of the Basques. They had little time to waste, we felt, as we heard the sounds of the returning farm carts and saw the long line of cows come slowly down the lane. The men would be waiting for their early supper.



## The Basque Country

So we turned our back on what seemed like a page out of some old book, and faced a black sky and a stillness more ominous than wind. In spite of the schoolmaster's cheerful flow of words, there was something really terrifying in the storm that we saw mounting from every quarter of the valley. The sky was as black as the mountains around us. We wondered if the schoolmaster did not see.



## CHAPTER XVII

### *THE STORM IN THE CABARET*

**B**UT indeed, as we afterwards knew, the schoolmaster felt the storm as only a Basque could.

His words gave wings to his feet which led us swiftly over the vineyard-covered hills between Uhart and Uhart-Cize. The heavy stillness oppressed us. The black sky was torn with lightning, which showed us the great beeches on the citadel hill at St. Jean-Pied-de-Port tossing in the wind. We had reached the outskirts of Uhart-Cize when the lightning ripped the black sky behind Orisson, and at the same moment the first crash of thunder was answered by the cracked, strident, furious ringing of the bell in the little church above us. The schoolmaster crossed himself—and now with a glance around the horizon hurried us on. Not a drop of rain had yet fallen. Through the streets of Uhart-Cize we tore, the mounting clangour of the bell mingled with the rumble of the thunder. The schoolmaster vainly endeavoured to maintain an unmoved exterior in the face of that frenzied din which touched some elemental chord in his apparently

## The Basque Country

conventional soul. It was, he explained, an absurd anachronism. The people, the *ignorant* people still believed that the devils lived on the mountains and made the thunderstorms, and the bell rang to drive away the evil spirits, to avert the rain and hail, and to calm the storm.

Little gusts of wind now came to meet us, driving the dust in spirals down the street. As we turned the corner in sight of the outer walls of St. Jean, the rain struck us—a sheet of rain. Following the schoolmaster, we made a breathless dive for a cabaret, but were held at the door, which was unbarred by an old woman from within. She was white—she had barred it against the storm. We stood inside, already wet and excited, and looked around the little room. The old woman had retired behind the small counter with its poor array of bottles and glasses. There were three bare tables and chairs between us and another woman who stood leaning against the closed door into the next room. The atmosphere was electric, not with the storm only, but with some spiritual disturbance which may be felt but not as yet explained. Outside, during the pleasant afternoon, we and the schoolmaster had been friends. Here we felt alone, outsiders cut off from some cult of which he formed one with the two strange women.

We sat down at a table. The woman by the door never stirred, but not for a second were we unconscious of her presence. The storm battled above the house, the wind shrieked, the hail beat against the

## The Storm in the Cabaret

windows, the thunder crashed, and through it all came the insistent note of the bell—ding-ding-ding, ding-ding-ding. It gained a personality, it seemed a feeble human voice imploring the ruthless Heaven—ding-ding-ding, ding-ding-ding. The old woman crossed herself, the schoolmaster followed suit. Then the woman by the door slowly moved forward, an evil look in her thin face, one hand on her hip. Her dress was ragged, her feet bare, a tattered shawl was around her shoulders, and her black hair fell over her tired eyes, half closed and dark lined. She swaggered—no other word better expresses the action—into the room, talking a tongue that we did not recognise.

The schoolmaster kept his back resolutely turned, but we felt his chill of fear, of fascination and repulsion. Her voice rose. She was speaking to him with an insistence which took no denial. He turned his chair and removed his battered hat as if for air, though by this time the chill of the storm was in the room and we were shivering. We saw that his white forehead was clammy under the thin hair. He answered her in a low voice, apologetic. She drew nearer, still talking, with free rapid gestures to the black sky, to us. He called for red wine.

The old woman brought a bottle and glasses, speaking with some remonstrance mixed with deference to these vivid figures in the centre of the small room. Anathema seemed to answer her, for she shrivelled and withdrew behind the bar. The gipsy—for we

## The Basque Country

knew her for that—drew nearer and touched the schoolmaster's arm. She laughed, smoothing his shoulder. He turned a foolish, frightened face to us. We felt his longing to hold the respect of the strangers, his dread of offending the woman. We strove to convey our understanding, though we only partly understood. He poured the wine in the glasses, which he offered to us and to the woman. A momentary lull in the storm brought with it again the strident appeal of the bell, followed by a more appalling crash of thunder and an outburst of greater fury. The hailstones rattled and danced and lay like snow on the road; the wind found its way through every crevice, and a blackness of night seemed to have settled upon the earth. We sat nerve-bound and miserable, when the climax was reached. The woman dropped her glass with a crash and without a word rushed out into the storm. We saw her pass the window as if swept by on the blast, while with trembling fingers the schoolmaster filled his glass and turned to us a face in which apology strove with relief. The old woman muttered a prayer. We dared not ask a question, but as the storm abated and the ringing of the bell grew slower and finally stopped, the schoolmaster regained his jaunty air. He shrugged :

“C'est une Bohémienne,” he volunteered. “The people, the *ignorant* people believe that she is a witch. Oh yes, even to-day they believe it; that she can bring you bad luck. It is absurd, Madame. But what will you—the gipsies have lived for centuries in the country,



STORM IN THE VALLEY.







## The Storm in the Cabaret

always feared and hated, always tracked by the authorities and by the people. They have been beaten out of the towns with whips. Laws were made against them, but every one feared to carry them out, magistrates, nobles and people. And so they have remained, always strangers to the customs of the country, keeping to themselves. They live pell-mell, all together in old houses or barns, the walls black with smoke. You see them along the rivers gathering reeds to make baskets. They can charm the fish. The men are horse-dealers. They are strange people. You have seen, Madame. And the ignorant people, the people without education, are afraid. Indeed they are. Is it not so, *ma mère* ? ” turning to the old woman who busied herself with her knitting behind the counter. “ If a gipsy knocks at the door at night, the people dare not open ? ” The old woman volubly assented. “ Yet there are people who fear their spell so much that they give them whatever they ask.” He paused. He was almost himself again.

“ In the eighteenth century,” the schoolmaster continued, “ there was a price, twenty-four livres, on their heads, and the tocsin rang to chase the gipsies, women and children out of St. Jean and to imprison the men. But the people were afraid, and so they always came back.” He sighed. “ They will always be with us,” he said.

The thunder was rumbling away across the hills, but the rain still came down steadily, and as

## The Basque Country

steadily, with a little persuasion, over hot coffee and cognac, the little man talked on, of sorcery and superstitions, subjects which seemed born of the past hour, and all that we can remember of that talk is here :

“There is another race, besides the Bohemians, who were here long before them, despised by Christians—the Cagots.” The old woman crooned to herself. “They were the descendants of the lepers of the early Middle Ages. Yes. Yes, horrible indeed—outcasts. The churches had a special corner for them, a special door and special holy water. They were isolated. They were beggars and lived no one knew how till the sixteenth century, when they complained to the Pope against their hard lot. There was a medical examination then, and Louis XIV commanded that the social ban under which they lived should be removed. They were allowed to marry, to choose a trade, and had to pay a tax. But there are places that I could mention where you find their descendants still, who inspire one with horror. No, they never practised witchcraft. They were simply a low and despised race. And what is witchcraft, Madame? Was it not Paracelsus himself who said when he burned his books of medicine at Bâle that all he knew he had learned from the sorcerers? The only physicians who existed for a thousand years were the sorcerers, the witches. If one succeeded in her cures she was respected and called *Bonne Dame*, or *Bella Donna*. It was after her own name that her

## The Storm in the Cabaret

favourite plant was called, the poison which she used as an antidote to the plagues of the Middle Ages. If she failed to cure, she was burnt. These are indeed strange subjects. Only the people, the ignorant, believe in these things now. They know spells against evil and charms against Trufadec, the *far-fadet*, who worries the housewife, makes the milk to turn, ties knots in the horses' manes—a mischievous sprite——”

“Puck in English,” we said.

“Puck?” the schoolmaster repeated. “Then, Madame, they believe in these charms in England?”

“Oh, only the ignorant,” we hastened to assure.

“And I suppose there are charms such as we have in the Basque country?”

“Such as?”

“Well,” explained the schoolmaster, “there is the charm against an infant’s crying. The ignorant people believe that if the one carrying the baby to baptism looks back on the way to church, the child will cry for a year. So, if this happens by mischance, when they return to the house after the baptism, someone takes the baby out to the pig-sty, and there, just for a moment, they lay it on a rake with nine points while they say something like this: ‘My baby whom the tempter has caused to weep, cease thy weeping in the miseries of this pig-sty. Now, come and laugh in thy home where no one wishes thee

## The Basque Country

harm. You will have food and sleep and kisses and clothes and play. If you want anything else you shall have it. Little friend, do not cry. From this moment you shall lack nothing.'

"Then there is another, if the baptism has to be postponed. The baby is always baptised the day of its birth, if possible; if not, the devil may get possession of it in the night. So, to keep it safe, you must set two holy candles by its cot and say, 'Sleep, sleep, dear little one. You are safe with your little angel. To-morrow you shall have a holy name. Sleep.'

"But Puck?"

"Oh," he answered, "for your Puck, Madame, there are many charms. To be quite safe and keep him out, you must pluck a sprig of fennel. Madame knows! it has not a pleasant smell. Then this you will put in the keyhole of the door and you will say, 'If to-night any evil spirit through this keyhole will pass, fright him, fennel, with thy smell that he may not enter.' It is Trufadec who tries to spoil the sponge that is set for bread. He knocks on the door early, and the housewife thinks it is the baker come to fetch the sponge for the oven, and she gets up and runs down in the early light and opens the door and sees no one there, and so, Trufadec gets in to turn the baking sour. So, when she goes to bed at night, she says, 'At the knock of the baker alone, my God, may I awake. If Trufadec comes, may he bump his nose against the door.' But in



A RIVER IN THE BASQUE COUNTRY.



mid 19th c.





## The Storm in the Cabaret

England, doubtless, Madame has the same charms, and I am wearying her with these foolish things which are only for the ignorant. *A la bonne heure!* The rain is over, and Madame will pardon if I leave her here, as it is late and my old mother is waiting."



## CHAPTER XVIII

### *THE VALLEY OF THE LAURHIBAR*

AFTER a few market days in the little town, with the attendant dust and crowd and noise, you will be glad to escape into the country. But you may be sure that, by any road you take, you will meet the market coming to you.

Over the bridge, as you go out of the town on the road that leads to St. Jean-le-Vieux and the villages up the valley of the Laurhibar, sits a beggar by the roadside, mumbling prayers while he jingles a few suggestive pennies in his extended hat. Jogging along towards you is a small donkey carrying a very bony old woman who holds up an umbrella to keep off the already hot sun, sitting so far back on the little beast that her feet in their black espadrilles stick out at right angles. She gives you a pleasant greeting, as do all of the long procession that follows : the farmer with the litter of clean, fat little pigs under a wire netting in the back of his cart ; the pretty girls with best boots and blouses, and the produce of dairy or poultry-yard in the baskets on their arms ; the old man with the alert step and lined

## The Valley of the Laurhibar

brown face who shepherds the flock of long-haired mountain sheep; the buxom matron driving the handsome black mule to a high market cart; the grave young man with the fine head who preserves his dignity even at one end of a rope with a sow at the other; the blue-bloused father and son urging on the drove of cream-coloured calves and bullocks; the woman mounted on a bony mule with a lamb slung across its withers; the patriarch on the slow-stepping pony with the rich trappings; the curé driven by the young soldier in a dog-cart; and to end the procession which unwinds like a frieze, comes a small and shabby victoria driven by a peasant in *béret* and blouse, drawn by a pair of mismated rough ponies going at a good pace and bearing along the lady of the neighbouring château. There is only a glimpse of her dignified figure in black, and of her snow-white hair and face so typically French, with its half-humorous look of lessons learned, of ripe judgment, of rare common-sense combined with charm and overlaid with sadness.

The four kilometres to St. Jean-le-Vieux are quickly sped. It is only here that you find a disappointment, for, in spite of its name, there is very little that is old or interesting in the place. It is hard to believe that it was once a town of importance. It is too old and not old enough. The square is small and sleepy, and the stone market-cross has no date or hint of its history. The church has a beautiful early Romanesque portal with fantastically carved

## The Basque Country

capitals. As you see by the legend cut in stone above by,

VIYCAISY RECTORE  
FAIT REPARATIO 1630.

Above, within the arch, is the same design as that over the portal at Sauveterre, but here the letters of the Alpha and Omega are in the usual sequence. Just inside the church door is the ancient stoup in the wall for the holy water. The confessionals bear the names of the Basque priests, Yaun Essetore, Yaun Bikavioa, and written up clearly are the prices of the masses :

Messe basse—Prêtre . . . .	3 fr.
La Benoîte . . . .	30 c.
Enfant de chœur . . . .	10 c.
Fabrique . . . .	10 c.
	<hr/>
	3 fr. 50 c.

which is not so very expensive for the comfort it gives.

In the churchyard, among the flowers and the gravestones, we meet the benign curé, who is not the mine of information we had hoped. But if he is not wise as to dates, he at least knows the road to Bussunarits : the first to the right out of the square.

It proves to be a lane rather than a road, and leads you past a house or two and then through woods, with a sweep down between great chestnuts to a stone bridge over a stream which has come straight down from the Col d'Ascombolia, one of the many mountain streams to join the Nive and finally swell the Nivelle.

## The Valley of the Laurhibar

It was a glorious spot. A huge bed of yellow lilies grew just over the wall, reflected in the water, and beyond the turf of the bank was short and green and shaded by a huge beech tree. The very place for lunch when we should have returned from the village, which lay another kilometre away across the fields, by a path which led along hedges of blossoming may. Bussunarits was deserted. Everyone was at the market at St. Jean. The place was silent in the heat; only two fat puppies rolled in the dust of the straggling street. The few houses were of wide, spreading air, which seemed to gather under their wings both livestock and humans with a large charity.

Returning by the road, we found that our bridge was the approach to the Château of Sarrasquette, the only one standing in all this part of the country which dates from the eleventh century. Through the luxuriant growth of tree and creeper and flower in the garden, the old walls and towers gleamed coolly violet, their windows shuttered with faded greenish blue. There were roses everywhere, bamboos and figs and shrubs of a sweet, unfamiliar pink flower. The château seemed as deserted as the village.

After our lunch upon the river bank, we followed a lane to the left which led up through sweeps of turf and young bracken, flecked with the bright rose of foxglove, beneath great oaks and chestnuts, to the top of the height between the Bussunarits valley and the valley of the Laurhibar river, which rises under the Col de Currutch some ten miles distant.

## The Basque Country

Here, towering quite at hand was the grey point of Béhorléguy, which stands at the end of every vista west from St. Jean-Pied-de-Port. The mountains were all hazy in the heat. A lane led down from here to the left which brought us out at the centre of the village of Ahaxe on the hill. Although a tiny hamlet it makes, with its suburbs of Alciettë and Bascassan in the valleys, quite a fair-sized commune. Upon the green irregular square, with a cross and a great walnut tree in the centre, stand four houses and a church. The church looks patched, the new masonry running into the old stone of the tower and portal. A peasant girl was busy inside, where, as usual in this month of May, the altar to the Virgin was abloom with flowers. This was the Virgin of Lourdes in white robe and blue scarf, the golden roses budding on her bare feet, with Bernadette, the shepherdess, kneeling rapt beside her. A subject for innocent dreams, for spiritual fervour, when on the May evenings the women and the girls kneel here and mingle their voices in the Basque refrain :

Yainkoaren Anna,  
Anna guyiz ona,  
Dezagem maita } *bis.\**  
Bethi ! bethi ! }

Then are the tapers of remembrance lighted to the dear dead, those coils of wax taper which now wait in their baskets swathed in crape upon the empty chairs.

\* Mère de Dieu, Mère toute bonne,  
Que nous vous aimons, toujours ! toujours !

## The Valley of the Laurhibar

The slanting porch of red tiles offered a cool shade, from which in the heat we drowsily studied the family names on the old tombstones, such curious Basque names, Jaureguiberry, Apecteche, Echegaray, Domezain, Olhaïby, and others with their unusual combinations of letters.

Here, as at Bidart, on the floor of the porch were the family tombstones where at certain seasons, All Saints' Day and Good Friday, the women kneel on those black carpets stitched with white appliqué of crosses and of tears, to make their pious prayers for the dead.

The quiet peasant girl, her duties done, came out and lingered as we talked to her. She was alone, everyone had gone to the market at St. Jean. Only she was left because the *grand'mère* was dead—up there. She nodded to the house at the top of the square. Oh, quite quietly she had died, but first she had arranged everything for the *enterrement*. We thought we had not heard aright. Yes, for her own *enterrement*—but why not? The grandmother was very lively and she would have everything done in order. She made them get out her wedding-dress which she would wear—yes—and ordered many candles, and black ribbons to tie up her head and her hands on her breast. She had not even forgotten the bees. Grandmother was always very particular to keep friends with the bees. And surely no other bees gave as much honey. Grandmother said that you must talk to them. You must be very polite



## The Basque Country

and address them by their names, *Mesdemoiselle Belles et Bonnes*, so she had had to go and tell the bees that grandmother was dead. She hoped they would not go away, but they had seemed very angry.

A line of Kipling came back to one :—

“ And if you'll not deceive your bees,  
Your bees will never leave you,”

which enabled us to reassure her.

*Eh bien*, she must be going. There was much to prepare for the funeral feast. There would be many guests. She ended with an aphorism : “ Death,” she said, “ comes to us all. There is no use making phrases. It is but natural. *A chaque jour suffit la peine, et Dieu est toujours là.*” She walked stolidly away from us across the close green grass, and we watched her till she disappeared into the big grey house, where the beehives stood against the garden wall. And this is the race whom Voltaire described as “ *Un petit peuple qui saute et qui danse au haut des Pyrénées !* ”

Going down the hill to join the main road to Lecumberry and Mendive, we fell in with a farmer who naïvely regretted his inability to speak English. He assured us with apologies that he only spoke French and Basque, *une langue brute*. He pointed us out our way. From Lecumberry and Mendive, close under Béhorléguy, there is a mountain path by which those who are blessed with time may go over the hills to the villages on the Alphoura river and so to Tardets.



A BASQUE VILLAGE—MOONLIGHT.





## The Valley of the Laurhibar

Returning from the head of the valley on the main road near Ahaxe, you will find a group of two or three houses, where, while you drink a cooling glass of white wine and citron in a small cabaret, you discover two Latin inscriptions upon two tablets let into the wall of a house opposite. With patience and difficulty, owing to the lack of spacing between words, partial effacement by weather, and the stone-cutter's free handling of an unknown tongue, you may decipher the legend :

ISTA . CAPELANIA . S  
ANCITA . FUIT . A . GUILL  
ERMO . DE . CURUCHET . A  
NNO . DOMINI . 1671 . CUI  
US . SUMMA . PRINCIPALIS .  
EST . TER . SEPTEMILLIA . LI  
BRARUM . MINISTER . HUIUS . CA  
PELANIE . TENEBITUR . CELEB  
RARE . MISSAM . OMNIBUS . DI  
EBUS . ET . ETIAM . INSTRUE  
RE . OMNES . CUI . ILLUC . ACC  
ESSERINT . DISCENDI . CA  
USA . DOCTRINAM .

ADDO . 2000 . LIBRAS . OPTANDO . EX  
EARUM . FLORE . CELEBRETUR .  
SINGULIS . DIEBUS  
VENERIS . UNA . MISSA  
IN . OPEM . ANIMARUM  
IN . PURGATORIO . EXISTENT  
IUM . ANNO . 1675 .

## The Basque Country

The English translation of which runs :

“This chaplaincy was founded by William de Curuchet in 1671, of which the capital is twenty-one thousand pounds. The minister of this chaplaincy will be bound to celebrate Mass every day and also to instruct all who may resort thither for the purpose of learning (Christian) doctrine.

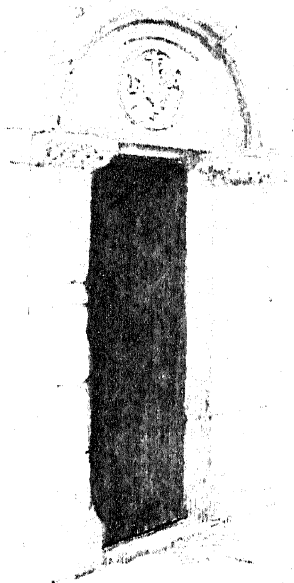
“I add 2,000 pounds, wishing that out of the revenue one Mass may be celebrated every Friday for the succour of souls in purgatory. In the year 1675.”

How often have we come upon tiny votive chapels in the woods and fields of Brittany, all trace of whose origin is lost! Here we have the record of the intention, but the chapel has vanished so completely that even the woman who lives in the house behind the tablet can tell you nothing of its fate.

But the joy of this May day is, after all, not in the past, but in the blue of the sky, the great lazy clouds, the shadow and light on the mountain, the wonderful variation of the way, moorland, woodland, ploughed field, meadow, river. If you would enjoy it to the full, take the path following the left bank of the river from Ahaxe back to St. Jean-le-Vieux, and again from St. Jean-le-Vieux on to St. Jean-Pied-de-Port. You will then have green memories to store against grey winter days. An island stormed around by the rocky stream, carpeted in the shade of trees by lily-of-the-valley, a hillside meadow fringing a waterfall with silvery campion and feathery mountain-pink, a marshy bit

## The Valley of the Laurhibar

by the long reach where orchis patch the ground with rose and white and purple, jolly meadows all aglow with every meadow flower, blossom in the orchard, blossom in the hedges, and, in the oak wood along the water, the sun slanting through beds of tall purple columbine above a sheet of blue forget-me-nots. Such was the glory, faintly described, that held us all the way to La Madeleine, that chapel on the pilgrim's way. There, as a last gift of the day, we had the château on the hill, like a dream of Italy pale amidst the dark of cypress trees and towering stone pines, against the far mountains rosy in the last rays of the setting sun.





## CHAPTER XIX

### *CRUX CAROLI*

“ **I** N the territory of the Basques there is a mountain where is the Pass of Cize. It is 8,000 feet up and 8,000 feet down. It is so high that it seems to reach the sky and those who make its ascent feel that they can touch the sky with their hands. From the height you can see the sea of Brittany and the frontiers of three countries, Castille, Aragon and France. On the top of this pass is a place called *Crux Caroli*, because Charlemagne going into Spain here traced his road with axe and spade, and having raised a cross to the Saviour on the highest point, bent his knee, his face turned to Gaul, and made a prayer to St. Jacques. Since then the pilgrims kneel at this spot, their eyes turned to Compostela, make a prayer and plant each one his cross. You find thousands of them there.

“ On this same mountain is a valley called Val Carlos in which Charlemagne and his army were received when death had overtaken his warriors at Roncevaux. Many of the pilgrims pass this way. When you have descended the mountain on the other

## Crux Caroli

side, you find the hostel and the church in which is the rock that Roland, the great hero, cleft with three strokes of his sword. Next comes Roncevaux where the great battle was fought in which there fell King Marsile, Roland, Oliver and 140,000 warriors, as many Christians as Saracens."

Pastorales and legends sing the valour of the paladins of Charlemagne. They hold a place within the blue-and-gold covers of the Book of Romance. The echo of the song of Roland has come down across the gulf of time and stirred us with pride for the far-off days of brave deeds. Now here at St. Jean-Pied-de-Port you are at the foot of that fabled pass. You may tread this battlefield of Roncevaux and stand where Roland fell. You may follow the pilgrims' way, but in safety, not as in the days when they sang :

Changer nous fallut nos gros blancs  
Quand nous fûmes dans Bayonne,  
Nos quarts d'écus, qu'on nomme francs,  
Que notre monnaie en somme,  
Semblement notre couronne.  
C'est pour les Basques passer,  
Où il y a d'étrange monde,  
On ne les entend pas parler.

And have no fear that you must climb the 8,000 feet of the old writer of the *Codex de Compostela*. It doubtless seemed as high to the weary pilgrims who had come half across Europe, but in fact it is only somewhat over 3,000 feet above the sea.

## The Basque Country

If you leave St. Jean on a Sunday on foot for Val Carlos, you will pass through Uhart-Cize where you may meet all the town coming from vespers. You may turn aside to enter the church, with its double gallery across the end for the men. The women always sit in the nave, their social rank determined by their nearness to the choir, and outside you will find that here, as in some of the other churches, the men enter the galleries by an exterior stone stair. You pass out over the iron grating at the churchyard gate that serves to keep out the ruminative pig and the grazing cow, which find full liberty on the village green outside.

Some lads are playing a game of *pelote* against the pink wall, practising for the matches which later in the summer will be held on every Sunday afternoon between rival villages.

From Uhart-Cize your way leads up the broad valley of the Arnéguy, where woods of oak, chestnut and beech are spaced by fields of wheat and maize, by vineyards and orchards. White Basque houses smile from their gardens, and, it being Sunday, around every cluster of houses there is an air of holiday. For Sunday is a day of rest from labour, when the families come down from their remote homes to join in the innocent amusements of the nearest hamlet. Under the shadow of every church, as at Uhart, boys are playing at *pelote*, and here along the roadside where the households all unite, the women and men are playing a game of bowls in the dust amidst

## Crux Caroli

much friendly laughter. Inside the little café you see the old men busy at cards.

The farther you go, the later the hour, the more whole-hearted the fun, till at a tiny village you stop to watch an impromptu dance upon the green—girls and men dancing to the *chiriliou*, the flute, played by an old man seated on a barrel, as in Brittany, the wine bottle at his side. The tune he is playing is the *Mutchikoak*, and the dancers dance a kind of mazurka.

We reached the village of Arnéguy, the frontier town, and, wishing to get on to Val Carlos for dinner, hastened to produce our passports. The French guards at the French side of the bridge over the dividing river, looked, smiled and passed us on to two surly-looking Spaniards who looked and invited us into a small guard-house. They inspected our papers from every angle, discovered we were English, an officer and a lady who had something to do with the Red Cross. This seemed the last trial to their civility, and they rudely declared that the papers were not in order and that we could not pass. It was in vain that we showed them the Spanish visa in Bayonne which had taken us into Fontarabia. They declared that we must have a signature from the Spanish consul at St. Jean, who had assured us only the day before that our passports lacked nothing to carry us to Madrid, if we liked.

We returned over the bridge, crestfallen and disappointed, to be met by the sympathetic French.

## The Basque Country

A brilliant thought! Would some one ride back the eight kilometres on a bicycle with the papers and a note to get the necessary signature? The mayor of the village introduced himself and invited us to the mayoral parlour, which was a stuffy café, helped compose the note to the consul, procured a boy and sent off the papers. The whole village seemed to take a delight in trying to circumvent the Spanish guards.

Dinner in the front room of a cabaret was over, to the accompaniment of dancing and noise at the back, where a dozen men were drinking, when the messenger returned—with the signature. At nine o'clock, in the starlight, cheered on our way by the good wishes of the mayor and the village, we started across the bridge, passed the guards and were on the road to Val Carlos, four kilometres along the valley. But though the name of the town is Val, the winding road was always mounting. In the dark the distance lengthened and our footsteps sounded loud in the night. It seemed ages before we saw the glimmer of a light above us, to which by the circling road we at length arrived. It was an outpost of the town, which stretched a mile. Every house here was dark, and we wondered how we should find the inn, when we met a Spanish gentleman in a cloak who answered our inquiries kindly and undertook to pilot us to the Fonda Marcellino. When we reached the square we had no further need of a guide, for the fonda, a large Basque house, was brightly lighted and we

## Crux Caroli

saw by the church clock opposite that it was only ten.

Yet when we reached the huge arched and open door, the fonda looked like no inn that we had ever seen. Within was the large, stone-flagged hall of the Basque house, filled with an odd collection of men who were drinking at a long table, of children half asleep under foot, of dogs and women coming and going between a kitchen on one side and a dining-room at the back where half a dozen people were still at table. Into this room we were shown, and were left, when the ladies retired, drinking our hot coffee with an intelligent young Spanish doctor who assured us that confusion was the normal state of the house; that the *patron* of the fonda, old Marcellino, was the father of a large family, all of whom lived with their families beneath the roof; and that he, moreover, ruled them all with a rod of iron.

Old Marcellino, himself, was on the box of our carriage in the morning—a dignified, reserved old man with a fine head and features under the *béret*. As we drove up the defile of Val Carlos, the road ascending in zigzags, the sun shone gloriously hot above, while the valley below was still in deep shadow, every little green field and bank by the river white with the heavy dew. The road mounts along the flanks of Caindela and Doray, hills which lie in Spain, while the river in the valley forms the frontier line. Beyond the hamlet of Ganicotela, the road mounts the side

## The Basque Country

of Altabiscar, higher and higher, giving us every moment more glorious views back down the valley. Our *patron* drove dashing, with a jingling of bells and a crack of the whip, and the two ponies quickly overtook and passed the mule teams, three and four harnessed tandem, with the Spanish muleteers, drawing great empty wine casks back over the mountains to be filled again with Spanish wine. We played a game of hide-and-seek with a herd of cows, which were being driven up to the high pastures by two men and a little boy on horseback. We would overtake and pass them, only to find them before us on the road some miles or so ahead. I think the little boy enjoyed the game as much as we did. But we never once managed to see them take to the cattle trails which cut off the longer windings of the carriage road. When we arrived at the Venta Gorosgaray, perched at a bald peak of the road like an eyrie hanging over the precipice below, we knew we were in Spain. Two mule trains had met and were standing before the door, and the herd of cows was strung out along the road ahead. Drivers and muleteers, whose costumes were enlivened with scarlet sashes, as the mules were brightened by scarlet tassels and pompons, stood drinking together. Old Marcellino joined them with a lordly manner and was listened to with deference. Indeed the conversation was too long and uninteresting for patience, and we were glad when the herders trotted ahead shouting to their cows, and the muleteers cracked their long whips and we

## Crux Caroli

all started on the steepest part of our journey together. From here the road mounts through magnificent beech woods gently and gradually, as the schoolmaster said, and as gradually reaches the top of the divide where from the little plateau you may look back, "to the sea of Brittany" if your imagination serves you well. Here are the ruins of that chapel which Charlemagne built, browsed around by sheep, forgotten by everyone.

The road descends from the pass in an easy sweep, through grassy banks starred with violets beneath the shade of the great beeches, and brings you out suddenly on a level with the roof of the famous Royal College of Roncevaux, with its courtyard and cloisters and church tower. It sweeps around the buildings, through the village, and on you go four kilometres to Burguete for lunch. It is an ugly village, yet full of character, on a plain, lifted so high that the tops of the encircling blue mountains, patched with snow, seem near. You understand the old writer's feeling that "those who make the ascent feel that they can touch the sky," for the sky is very close and the air is so rarefied that you touch another realm.

The inn, more than Val Carlos, is Spain—the Spain that we have known—though it is the Basque country as well. The fonda was a place of cool, big spaces—grateful after the glare of the hot noon-tide, and it provided us with an astounding lunch of many courses, cooked in the Spanish style with oil and garlic and mysterious sauces, among which figured peppers and



## The Basque Country

a dish of tiny snails in their shells cooked with rice. The wine of the country was delicious.

Many of the houses in Burguete, like those everywhere in the Spanish Basque country, bear carved escutcheons above the doors. This reminds you that here one man in every four had the hereditary right to sit in judgment and that this distinction ennobled the family. Nobility, thus, did not depend upon property, but upon character. Here, too, you will see in the kitchens the central hearth in the middle of the room, piled with wood, the smoke ascending by a funnel-shaped hood through the roof.

From Burguete we made our pilgrimage back to Roncevaux on foot, most of the way through beech woods. Near the village, for quite half a mile, the beeches are planted in ranks known as the Abbé's walk. On the plain which stretches away on the opposite side of the road, tradition says that the battle of Roncevaux was fought on August 15, 778. Over that hill, beyond the roof of the Royal College, Charlemagne and the main body of his army passed, when the Basques and the Saracens fell upon that rear-guard to whom was given the honour of defending the retreat. They were the picked knights of Charlemagne, Roland, Oliver, and the twelve peers celebrated by the Troubadours. You can still hear the note of Roland's horn calling for help, a note as loud and clear as only he could blow, resounding up the valley, but never, alas, reaching the ears of Charlemagne over the pass. It is a great story, *The Song*

## Crux Caroli

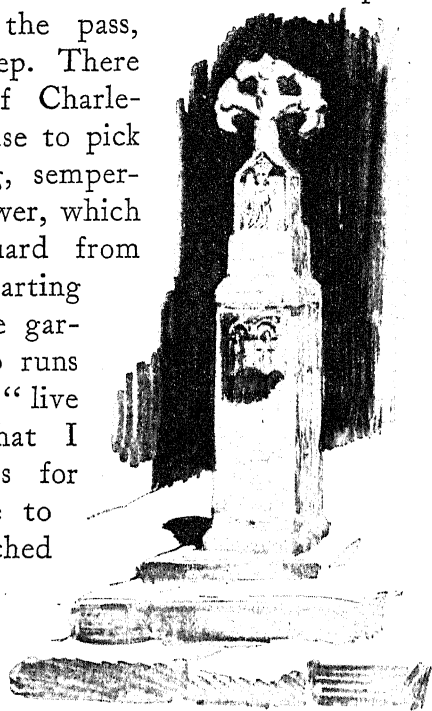
*of Roland*, greatly told, and here before you at the entrance to the village stands the tiny chapel, Chapelle du Saint-Esprit, built above the grave where the paladins were buried. Here in May masses are said for the repose of the soul of Roland and his companions.

Near the chapel is a very ancient cross. Is this the Crux Caroli? It is, at any rate, a pilgrim's cross, on the road which the pilgrims still take on the Wednesday before Pentecost. At daybreak on the morning of that day the little Spanish villages, for thirty miles around, are emptied of their folk. Village after village falls in to swell the procession which ascends the mountain, winding its penitential way through the exquisite beauty of these mountain roads—five hundred men, cowled, walking two abreast, carrying each upon his back a cross of wood. The mayors of the villages in capes, hat in hand, space the procession, as do the deacons in surplices carrying the gold banners of the villages. The women in black mantillas end the procession, intoning their endless litanies. Through the green paradise of the beeches this noiseless procession passes to the convent church, where they are lost in the great arched doorway of the massive pile. Roncevaux ranks in Spain as one of the most sacred shrines of the Christian faith, and takes its place after Jerusalem, Rome and Compostela. What a tradition it is that can keep alive for a thousand years and more a faith to inspire poor humanity to sacrifice! And yet—the roofs of that convent are

## The Basque Country

repaired with corrugated iron, and dirt and neglect mark its courts to the very doors of the sanctuary.

We follow the broad, peaceful, gradual ascent of the road, back to the pass, rejoicing in the flowers along the way, the close green turf thick with long-stemmed violets, the banks beautiful with a wealth of pink silenes, amourettes, the spires of the foxglove, columbine, campanulas, saxifrages and ferns. From the young green of beech woods we come out upon the bare plateau at the pass, cropped close by the sheep. There at the ruined door of Charlemagne's chapel we pause to pick a sprig of everlasting, *sempernum*—the Virgin's flower, which has the magic to guard from evil and to speed the parting soul. "Flower of the garden and the field," so runs the ancient prayer, "live beneath my roof—that I may obtain forgiveness for my sins, and help me to die." Before us stretched the far view "to the sea of Brittany" that the pilgrims saw.



## CHAPTER XX

### ST. ETIENNE DE BAÏGORRY

ST. Etienne de Baïgorry is the end of a branch line from Ossès on the line from Bayonne to St. Jean-Pied-de-Port. But we approached it by an easy road which leads pleasantly from St. Jean. It mounts imperceptibly, and leads through hamlets and by the vineyards of Irouleguy, famed for its wine. Here the peasants were busy amongst the vines. Each *coteau* up which the vineyards stretch is topped by a small, square white house where the tools are kept and where during the vintage season a guard sleeps to watch over the grapes. The church of Irouleguy stands on one such hill, and sent its double notes of the hours floating down the valley, for like all the Basque churches it strikes the hour twice over. It was a busy valley, where everyone was working; even a small boy of ten was driving a plough, while his minute sister walked at the oxen's heads, holding the long stick to guide them. They are wonderful little people, these Basque children. The four-year-olds drive the cows to pasture with a solemn air of importance. When they are twelve they go up on

## The Basque Country

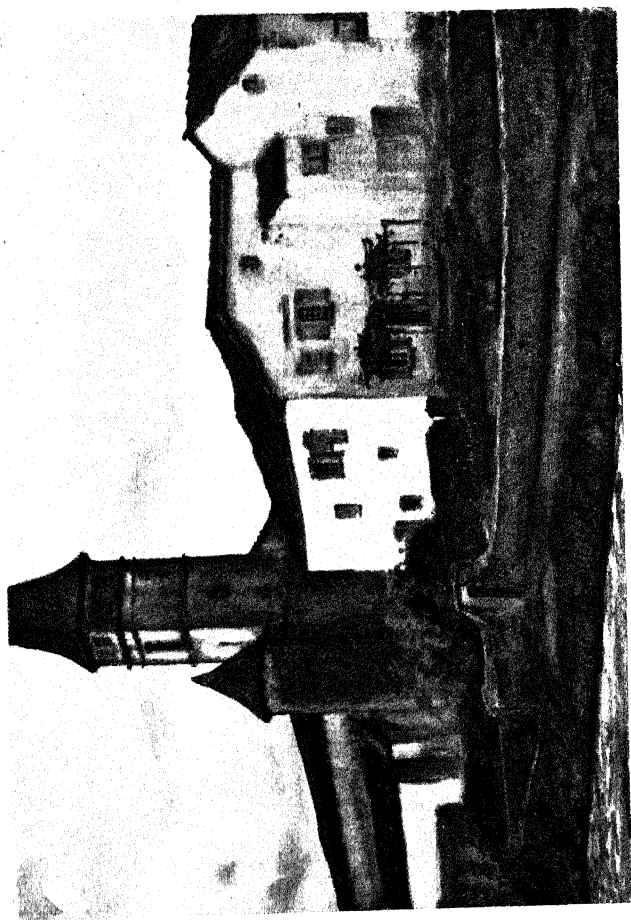
the mountain to guard the sheep from May to September. Sometimes, more often than not, they are quite alone except for the weekly messenger from the village who brings bread and ham and wine. This makes for self-reliance, if anything could—meeting whatever may come, whether storm or heat or a stray wild beast. Even when they are babies, the mother, though so devoted to her family, has little time for caresses, and it is to the grandmother, *Aita-Anna*, that they go for comfort. The grandmother is an institution in the Basque family, where she is revered and where her word is law.

In the village of Irouleguy an itinerant umbrella-mender had gathered about him all the unemployed. Umbrellas are an indispensable article in these mountains. Every peasant carries one, whether afoot or on horseback, on road or in field. Even more than the prevailing greenness and the abundant verdure do they tell of the frequent rains. The man had a great assortment of umbrellas with their owners around him, and was entertaining his audience, doubtless with the gossip of his wanderings.

From the village a paved lane brought us, between fern-hung walls, out to the crest of the hill which separates this valley from the Baïgorry valley, and we zigzagged down-hill through woods and fields till we came to the gate of a farm where we stopped to see the amusing inscription above the door. The farmer's wife came out with chairs for us and stood within the half-door prepared to be friendly. These peasant



CHURCH AT ST. ETIENNE DE BAÏGORRY.







## St. Etienne de Baïgorry

homesteads certainly are delightful. This house was roomy and cool, with its fresh whitewash and green shutters. A balcony ran along under the upper windows, and a vine found support there to drape the front of the house. At one side great stacks of dried bracken were stored ready for fodder and food for the cows. The bracken is cut on the highest slopes of the mountains from October to December. It is very hard work in which all the family assist. The bracken is cut with hooks, corded into great bundles, and is then rolled down the steepest slopes and carried on the heads or dragged on sledges to the farm.

In a shed the cut wood for the fires was piled. Behind the yard was the garden, growing four kinds of salad, onions, beans, peas, thyme, cabbages, artichokes, radishes, carrots and beets, clumps of iris and roses growing on the walls. Beyond grew potatoes, then a field of grain, a vineyard up the hillside, and a little wood with a dancing stream enclosed the demesne. This, the picture of so many Basque homesteads, seemed to us to hold all that any peasant heart could desire, the wherewithal for content and dignity and comfort.

But the farmer's wife had a different story to tell. Her only son had gone to the United States. He was working in a saw-mill in Portland, Oregon. It seemed incredible that anyone could choose the position of labourer in the west of America rather than that of freehold proprietor of this self-contained

## The Basque Country

paradise. "Ah, yes," she said, "all the boys go to America, and only some of them return. They are not satisfied with the wages here, and as soon as they are fifteen they want to go. They are not happy any longer. And some go at fifteen and some at twenty, but they all go in the end." Her boy had come over with the American Army to fight. Lots of the Basque boys had, and had come home on leave, and then all had gone away again.

There was a rumbling and cracking of whip, and her husband arrived at the yard driving his oxen to one of the classic carts with the small solid wheels which look like a chariot. He joined his wife shortly inside the half-door. They were a fine pair, still in middle age. He said it was his father who had built the house. Why, we asked, was the man on horseback, above the door, blowing a hunting horn? Because his father was an American. Great surprise on our part. That is to say, his father had gone to South America, and there he had hunted on horseback and made much money, so when he came home he built this house, and he had that carved above the door to remind him of his life in foreign lands. Oh yes, they assured us, anyone who has been to America, North or South, even for a few weeks, is called an American.

Someone spoke to the woman from within, and the husband explained that it was the tailoress, who came, he said, to sew—not clothes for him, but the village tailoress who does the sewing. No, his wife

## St. Etienne de Baïgorry

never sewed—no women had time to sew. They were too busy helping out of doors. He laughed. Their fingers, he said, were too stiff. No, it was the tailoress who went from house to house and did the sewing for everyone.

When they heard that we were going on to St. Etienne, they suggested that Le Trinquet was the best hotel. It was kept by his brother. They explained its excellencies and superiorities, and we decided that Le Trinquet and no other hostel should house us that night.

At the bend of the road below the farm, we found a small chapel in a farmyard facing the valley. An old woman who spoke only Basque came trundling out to open the door, and called a very small girl to an upper window to translate for her. It was the Chapel of San Salvatore and there were four masses every year. But, it was kept so beautifully, surely someone came to pray? The little maiden smiled. It was she and her friends in the next farm down the hill who took care of the chapel, and indeed they often came to pray. Not now so much, but during the war. Her father was away in the army, but he was safe. She as much as said it was all due to San Salvatore. But the old woman had an especial interest in Ste. Barbe, who hung from a rafter in the middle, dressed in a stiffly starched white robe.

The sun was getting low as we went down the hill through the poplars of Occo, and thence to the bridge over the Aldudes, where the road branches to

## The Basque Country

Baïgorry. We turned to the left up the valley, with a new range of mountains on our right making a sharp, jagged line against the sky. St. Etienne de Baïgorry runs for a mile along the stream, just one long street. We bravely passed the hump-backed bridge leading across to the guide-book hotel, and kept on under the walls of the Château d'Echaux, and were rewarded, for Le Trinquet was fresh and clean, and possessed a terrace all set round with flowers in green pots along the river in the shade of interlaced plane trees. It is opposite the church and the curé's garden, where fig and bamboo and wistaria hang over the wall. The church, which has no history, needed none that night to make it interesting against the sunset sky.

The next morning a toot signalled the arrival of the baker woman in her cart, and soon after a girl, tall and handsome, came bearing the carcasses of three lambs on a flat basket on her head, while down a rocky lane stepped a man leading a donkey laden with wine from Spain. Bread, meat and wine—we had no lack for our lunch on the height of the Col d'Ispeguy.

It is an easy ascent of only eight kilometres by the winding road, but takes two hours and a quarter because it is so steep. You can come down in half an hour, but you should not want to. From the top, where springy heather in the shade of beech trees, makes a soft seat, you get a view more interesting than many more famous views. You look down on

## St. Etienne de Baïgorry

a bowl-shaped valley in Spain, surrounded by mountains and dotted with villages, and it is quite possible to follow your wandering spirit down the zigzag mountain road and through the valley and behind the hills, and so, twelve kilometres, to Elizondo, and from there to Pampeluna and so to Roncevaux. That makes a good round. But you may also sit on the height with great contentment, filled with the tonic of the high air, and eat your lunch and sleep, or watch the cows browsing the fresh beech leaves and the long-haired goats and the wild ponies outlined against the sky on the farther slopes. The Spanish guards will interest you too, the low stone hut with the bit of garden and the friendly dog. They are melodramatic, the Spanish guards, in olive-green uniforms and gold braid and high odd patent-leather hats. They only desire to be pleasant, and wave aside the papers you hastily produce.

It is the going down again that is wonderful, with the view down the clear-cut gorges through black rock, to the lovely little green fields in the bottom. You see your road following these gorges in and out, always lower and lower, to the end of the valley. All the way the sound of running water is with you. There are streams everywhere. If it is hot, you may be lured high up a cleft in the hills to a hidden pool fringed with fern and columbine for a dip in the crystal water, with only the mountain goats near and a slanting sun-baked rock on which to dry. Above you, far up, on the high pastures are the

## The Basque Country

flocks grazing and the summer huts where the shepherds live. And over all, circling and circling, is a black speck, a watching hawk. The lizards, too, like the sun, tiny brown ones and emerald green. A bird of orange plumage flits by like a streak of light, while a hedge-sparrow sings its gurgling song on a bush close at hand. Life seems happy and glad and good up there.

The other valley which starts from St. Etienne de Baïgorry, an even lovelier valley, is the Baztan—the rat's tail. It runs winding between steep, wild hills, following the Aldudes River, for eighteen kilometres to Urepel.

All of this country came under the jurisdiction of the Governor of St. Jean-Pied-de-Port. It formed part of Basse-Navarre. The history seems confused in the local mind. The carpenter who came out to translate an inscription in the village knew they had had a king once, but was equally sure that they had always been free. That inscription carved in Basque above the old door in the main street reads: "With little, have we but peace, it is enough." Near it is the charming old door of the cobbler's shop. Nearly opposite another house bears the Latin inscription:

MEMORARE NOISSIME TUA ET IN ÆTERNUM  
NON PECCAUIS.

It is amusing to see how the fashion in inscriptions will run through a certain period or a certain village.

## St. Etienne de Baïgorry

In Baïgorry itself several houses of the eighteenth century have the inscription in this form :

VIVA PEDRO DELCRAGUI

VIVA JOANA DEBELLA

FAIT LE 27 VILLET 1773.

At Ossès there are some very interesting inscriptions.





## CHAPTER XXI

### CAMBO, ITXASSOU

DO not be misled by the space given to Cambo in the guide-books. That is, if you are looking for anything beyond a pleasant health-resort, with many villas in dense shade on a bluff above the river giving a fine view over the valley. But from Cambo you may reach one of the most charming corners of the *pays basque*, the little village of Itxassou, as well as Hasparren, where the great cattle markets of the Basque country are held, and the pretty village of Espelette on the Bessabure river.

Itxassou is only a group of houses clustered about a church, with no attempt at regularity, and one of these houses is called the Hôtel Teillery. There is nothing to show you that it is an hotel. It is a big white house set down on the close turf of the wild hillside, under huge oaks, in one of which you will find a platform where you may sit on a Sunday and look down on the churchyard and the long double-ended *pelote* court. You can look over the valley



CHURCH AT ITXASSOU.





## Cambo, Itxassou

too, and watch the peasants coming by the lanes and roads and field-paths to mass. They enter the churchyard from the opposite side behind the cypresses, and are swallowed up by the porch without your seeing them. Then suddenly a growing chant begins, and out from the arch of the porch towards you comes a procession headed by the choir boys, composed of hundreds of men, women and children, followed by the clergy, which takes its way three times around that ancient grey church, between those ancient round stones, singing a robust chant. When mass is over, a nun in black stands by the grey arched porch under a cypress tree holding a bag for alms. The men, young and old, come out first, in their best Sunday clothes, and stand along the path in knots. The women come out last, and pass the men and go out of the graveyard without a glance. It is only when they are under my oak that they all begin to talk and the men join them, and they walk as far as the mossy stone steps which form an estrade the length of the *pelote* court. Here parties of friends seat themselves and have not long to wait before the curé, a famous *pelote* player, appears with his partner to play a trial game. In the graveyard now only scattered figures in black remain kneeling at the graves of their dead, saying their beads.

*Pelote* is a beautiful game to watch played by the young Basques with muscles of steel. The *pelote* is a ball, small and very hard. It is played against a

## The Basque Country

wall, either with bare hands, which is the ancient Basque game, or with the *chistera*, a kind of hollow osier hand which is strapped to the forearm. The game varies as much as does fives as played in our different public schools. The game played against one wall with two or three on a side is called *blaid*; that played against two opposite walls, with five players to a side, is called *rebot*; and that played in a covered court is called *trinquet*. But the charm of the game lies very much in its surroundings. The court is usually the centre of the village, and sometimes most beautifully situated, as here at Itxassou on this lovely hillside backed by the height of l'Arsamendi, or as at St. Jean-Pied-de-Port where it stands surrounded by giant elms within the sixteenth-century walls.

The great day of the year at Itxassou is the feast of St. Fructueux in August, which is celebrated with dancing and games. Certainly the people of the valley do well to keep on good terms with this saint, if it is he who is responsible for its fruitfulness. Itxassou is the centre of the cherry country, and in May the cherry trees which border the roads are red with fruit. Cherries are offered you everywhere, and judging from the stained little faces, the children enjoy the abundance.

In the churchyard you will find a great number of discoid stones, with a greater variety of design than anywhere else in the French Basque country. From the gate on the farther side you pass into a triangle







## Cambo, Itxassou

of grass in the shade of trees, in the centre of which stands an ancient stone cross. It bears no date and the inscriptions are only deciphered with difficulty because of the lichen which has filled the letters of the words, which are all run together, as on many of the old tombstones. The first one runs : *Profitte, pêcheur, du Sang.* The other reads : *O Cruux, ave, spes unica, hoc passiones tempora.*

There are lovely walks about Itxassou in every direction. The most popular is that leading to the Pas de Roland, up the rocky chasm of the Nive. It is a rock jutting from the roadside, in the form of an arch. Why this is associated with the name of Charlemagne's paladin no one seems to know.

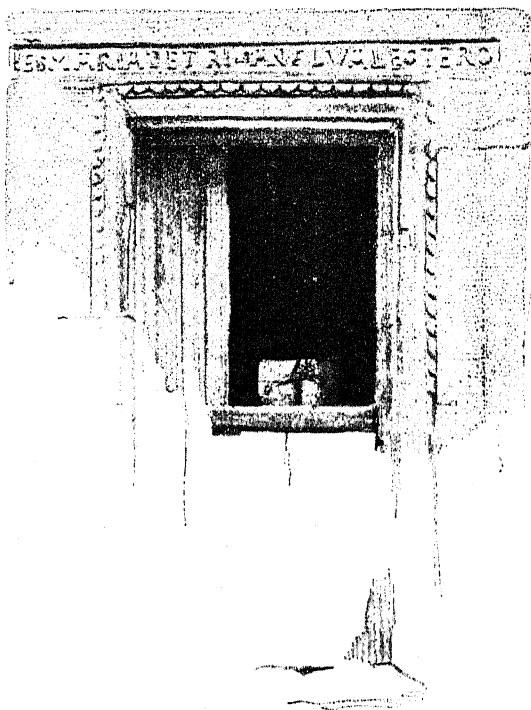
It is possible to sail from Itxassou down the Nive to Ustaritz in a local skiff called a *chaland*. Ustaritz was the ancient capital of Labourd. In a grove of oaks on the hill behind the town the *bilzaar* met. But to-day it is quite modern and gay in its appearance, extending along the bank of the Nive in a succession of gardens and villas, and it certainly is not the picture of Ustaritz which you will carry away as typical of the Basque land.

Your memory will be rather of a little country of beech forests, of clear streams, of smiling vineyards ; a country full of flowers and perfume, yet whose valleys are tinged with the melancholy inseparable from the hills ; a country whose people you love for their past and for the qualities which endear ; a

# The Basque Country

country which calls you, a stranger, back to it, and of which the Basques may well sing :

There is no country  
Comparable to my country.  
In my eyes, it resembles  
An ancient oak  
Which, partly uprooted,  
Is ever young and verdant.



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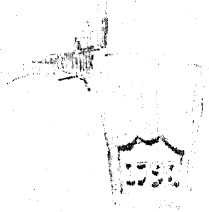
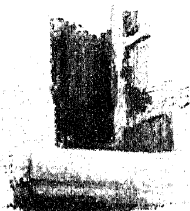
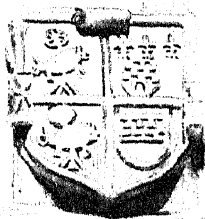
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